No. 278 / APRIL 1996

THE NI
NEW INTERNATIONALIST

# Seeds of change

## How to build a green economy

MONTHLY UK £2.20 AUS. $5.60 AOTEAROA/NZ $4.50 CANADA/US $4.50 SA R9.50 ◆ THE PEOPLE, THE IDEAS, THE ACTION IN THE FIGHT FOR WORLD DEVELOPMENT

COMING NEXT **MONTH**

# Join the Resistance

## A photographic celebration

STUART FRANKLIN / MAGNUM

Things may be in bad shape. But all over the world ordinary people are fighting back – joining campaigns, defending their rights or simply taking control of their lives. Next month's **NI** offers a showcase for some of the best international photographers who have captured this spirit of resistance on film – and tells some of the stories behind the freeze-frames.

- **Epochal explosions** – Key moments of twentieth-century resistance captured on camera, from Gandhi to Tiananmen Square, Vietnam to the Berlin Wall.
- **This is our life** – Photographs by women of women from all over Latin America, gathered together by a Peruvian group.
- **Anti-road rage** – Political resistance in Western countries has taken on a new lease of life thanks to imaginative direct action against new road schemes. The latest pictures from the frontline.
- **Marcos fever** – No, not the response to Imelda's latest comeback but the enthusiasm of peasants in Chiapas, Mexico, for the Zapatista guerrillas, who are led by a 'Comandante' of that name.
- **The Squatter Mayor** – The first day in office for the new black mayor of a town in South Africa's neo-Nazi heartland.
- **The forest fights back** – People protecting trees worldwide, from the Thai monk who wraps prayers around them to the Cameroonians saving the forest with their dancing.

**COMING SOON:** BURMA ◆ CLASS ◆ CRIME & PUNISHMENT ◆ ENDANGERED SPECIES

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**New Internationalist exists to report on the issues of world poverty and inequality; to focus attention on the unjust relationship between the powerful and powerless in both rich and poor nations; to debate and campaign for the radical changes necessary within and between those nations if the basic material and spiritual needs of all are to be met; and to bring to life the people, the ideas and the action in the fight for world development.**

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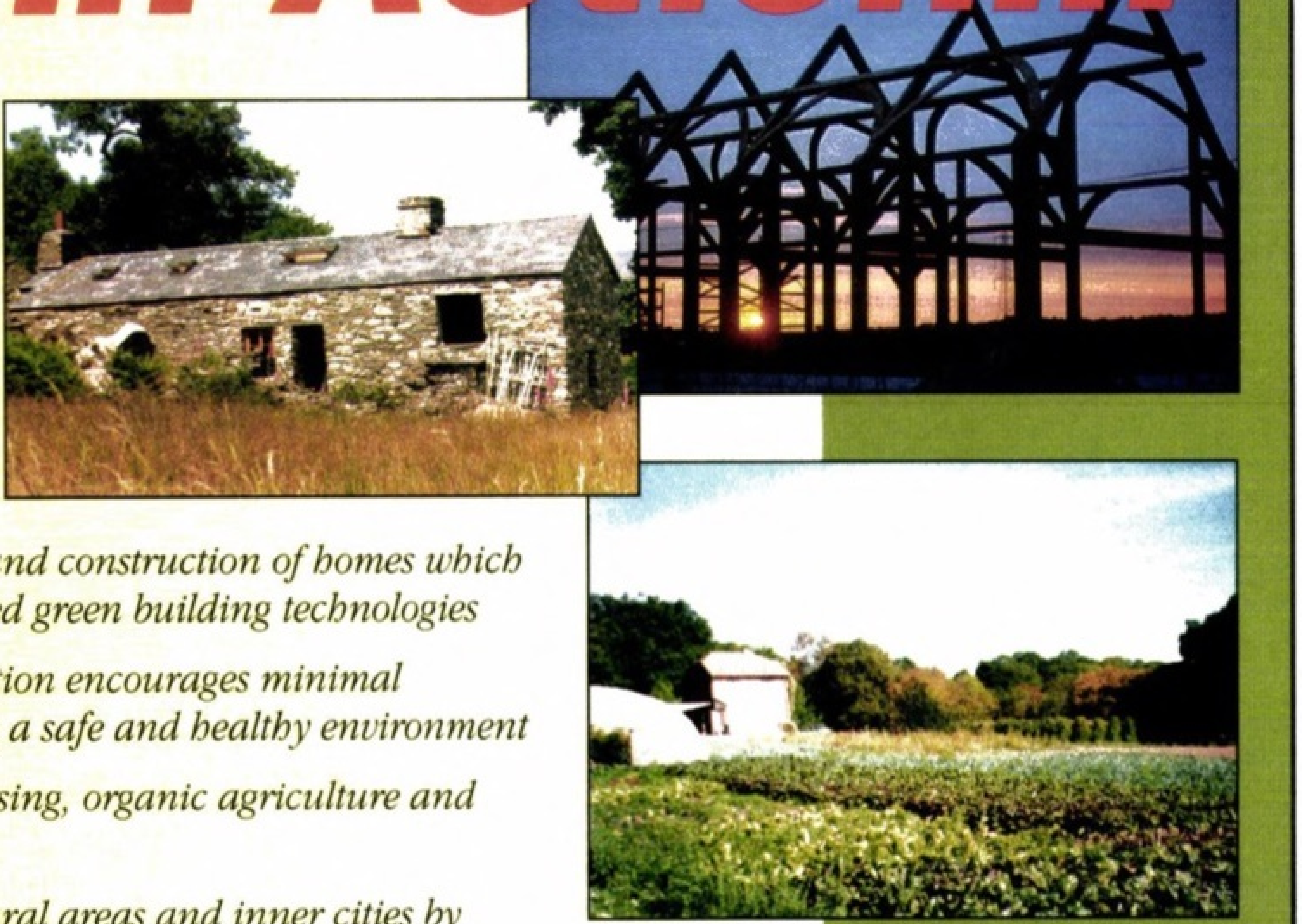

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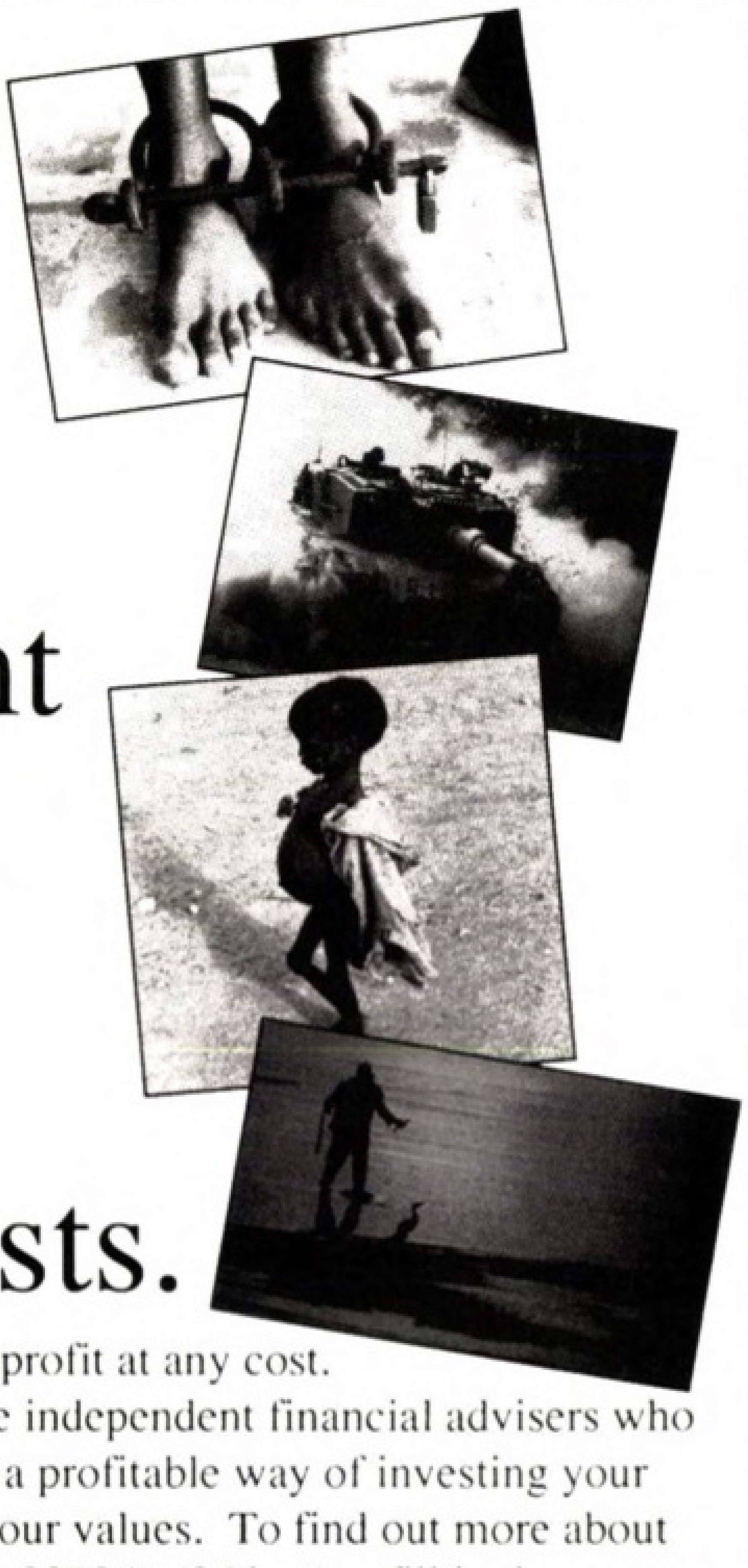

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Albania's first mental health resource centre has been set up by the Hamlet Trust with Triodos finance. The Centre provides community based training and support to people with mental health problems. With the help of British staff, local Albanians are being trained to run the Centre into the future.

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MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY **ANDREW KOKOTKA**
FRONT COVER ILLUSTRATION BY **BILL RUSSELL**

THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

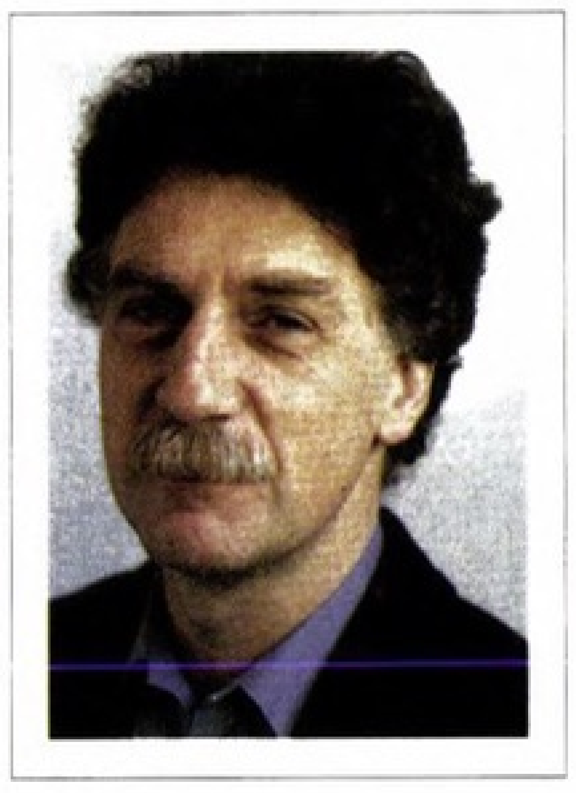
# Green Economics

FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITOR**

ONE of the great rewards of working here at the *New Internationalist* is our editorial freedom. As an editor, once you've plumped for a particular subject, you can pretty much go for it. There are few jobs in the media that offer this latitude. It's a challenge but also a real privilege to be able to comb through the literature, talk to those more knowledgeable than yourself and finally come to the conclusion that, yes, you're actually beginning to make some sense out of what at first appeared to be an almost impossibly complex subject.

Mind you it's not always clear sailing: simply carving out the time to research and read can be a battle. Running a publishing co-operative, as we do, means editors are often pulled in four directions at the same time. Unlike the mainstream media, all of us have to wear several hats at once and I'd be the first to admit that some of them don't fit that well.

Still, it's the 'intellectual buzz' that keeps us going. But once you've absorbed all the facts and arguments and come up with some kind of consistent analysis you're left with trying to make the magazine work in journalistic terms. And that's another story.



It helps to put ourselves in your shoes. Because we editors actually start from pretty much the same position as our readers – loaded with our own quirky baggage of bias, scepticism and curiosity. That understanding is really the foundation for building a successful magazine 'on-the-page'.

Take this issue on 'green economics'.

When I first I read about 'appropriated carrying capacity', 'biophysical limits to growth' and the tragic, perhaps irreversible destruction of the earth's functioning ecosystems, I confess to feeling a tinge of despair. Not unlike some readers, who tell us that the more they know about the world's problems the more depressed they feel.

But as I ploughed on and felt the energy and commitment of thousands of people attempting to define an alternative economic future, that despair faded. I began to realize that it's impossible to come up with a solution until you fully understand the problem.

So in this issue I've attempted to do both – to give a clear sense of the down-side but also to point to the green path beyond.

Because the path *is* there, though many more of us are needed to help build it. As an old Zen saying would have it, there's lots more work to do: 'After ecstasy, the laundry.'

Wayne Ellwood

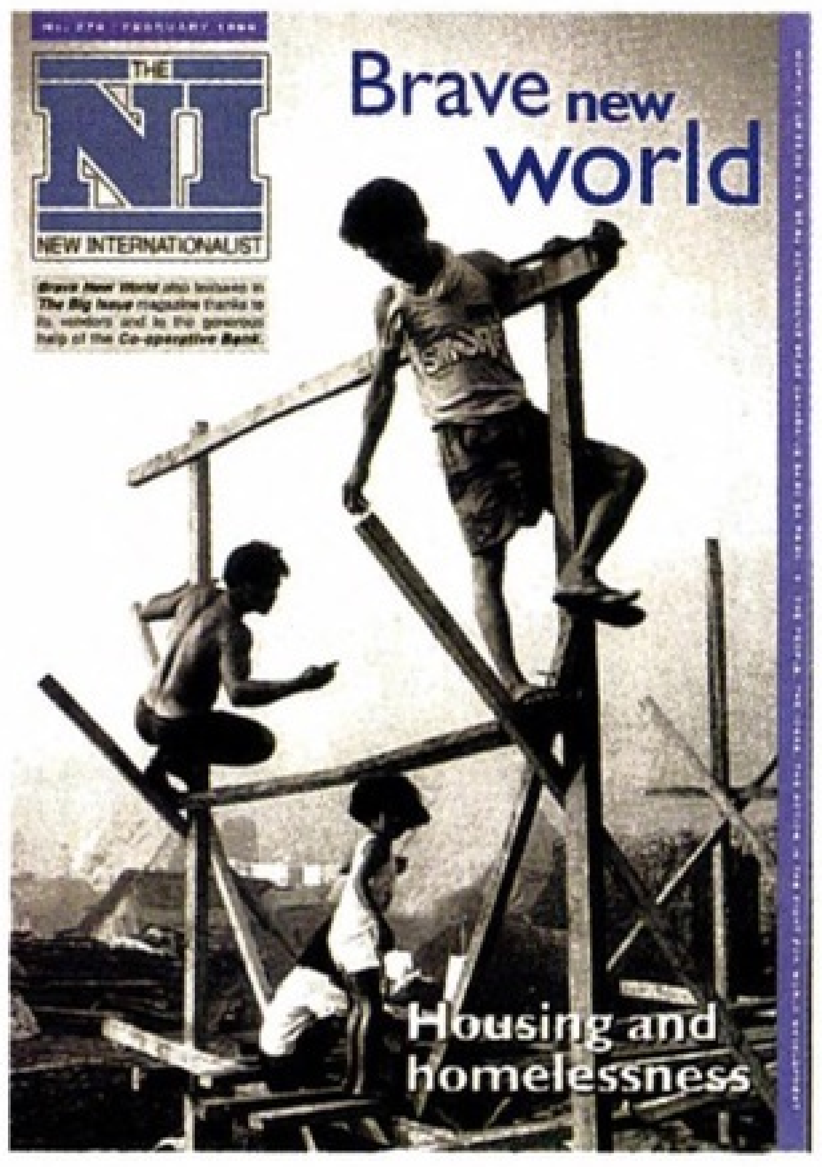
*Wayne Ellwood*
*for the* ***New Internationalist*** *Co-operative*

# Letters

**The New Internationalist welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address and e-mail are inside the front cover.**

## Workhouse

The **NI** and *The Big Issue* have done well to produce a magazine on homelessness (***Brave New World*, NI 276**). A home ranks as the third basic physical need after food to eat and clothes to wear. It ought to be accepted as a right that all should enjoy. A government that does not make efforts to provide this right to all its citizens is failing in its obligations.



Britain has the means to cure such wretchedness, to provide everyone with an acceptable home, but lacks the will to do so. 'Brave New World' indeed!

**Peter Little**
Henley-on-Thames, England

## Critical mass

Your dockless persecution of world power abusers (***In the Dock* NI 275**) could start an ongoing non-governmental alternative for world citizens.

A growing grassroots movement could press for 'police' to locate and arrest, 'judges' to 'indict', and 'bailiffs' to exact compensation from those who broke treaties on human rights and the environment.

Existing institutions rarely identify and deal with international perpetrators. An 'Adjudication International' or 'Conflict Resolution International' could shame officials as Amnesty does; it could campaign like the anti-slavery cohorts for nations to implement treaties; it could encourage the unempowered as women's international organizations do; it could sustain peace workers as the Red Cross does soldiers, and confront exploiters in the same way as Greenpeace and the Club of Rome.

In general, it could strengthen civil society and challenge social injustice through the use of law and order with a human face. It would link a critical mass of citizens towards a world democracy of peace.

**Hon Doug Everingham**
Adelaide, Australia

## Bigger boycott

I was outraged to see the Pakistani twins, one breastfed, the other on Nestlé's infant formula (***In the Dock* NI 275**), even I who have had my own personal boycott of Nestlé for the past 20 years since I read about their cunning promotions of infant formula. But seeing the result is a horror.

When billions of people are in bondage to a few who are comfortable, well-fed and apparently hateful of their fellow-humans (but need them to make their profits bigger), I wish I were three billion people rather than one person so that my boycott would have some meaning.

**Nancy Slagle**
Springfield, Oregon, US

## Gene slaves

The theories of mind and evolution promoted by Arthur Koestler are confident, eccentric – and wrong. He failed to demolish Darwinism because he didn't understand it. It was irresponsible of Macdonald Daly to give credence and publicity to his ideas (*Classic* **NI 275**).

Evolution does not happen as and when required but there is no reason for despair. Humans have hardly undergone any genetic evolution for perhaps 50,000 years, yet in a quarter of that time we have changed from hunter-gatherers to farmers and urbanites. Genetic change is not a prerequisite for cultural and intellectual development.

Our intellectual capacity and our ability to learn allow us to transcend or modify any instincts no longer suitable for our modern circumstances – and to overcome our physical frailties as well. We are truly responsible for our actions and for our environment. To say otherwise plays into the hands of odious right-wingers with their theories of innate racial and class difference.

We are not slaves to our genes, and there is all to play for in the fight for a fairer society.

**Stephen Lance**
Cambridge, England

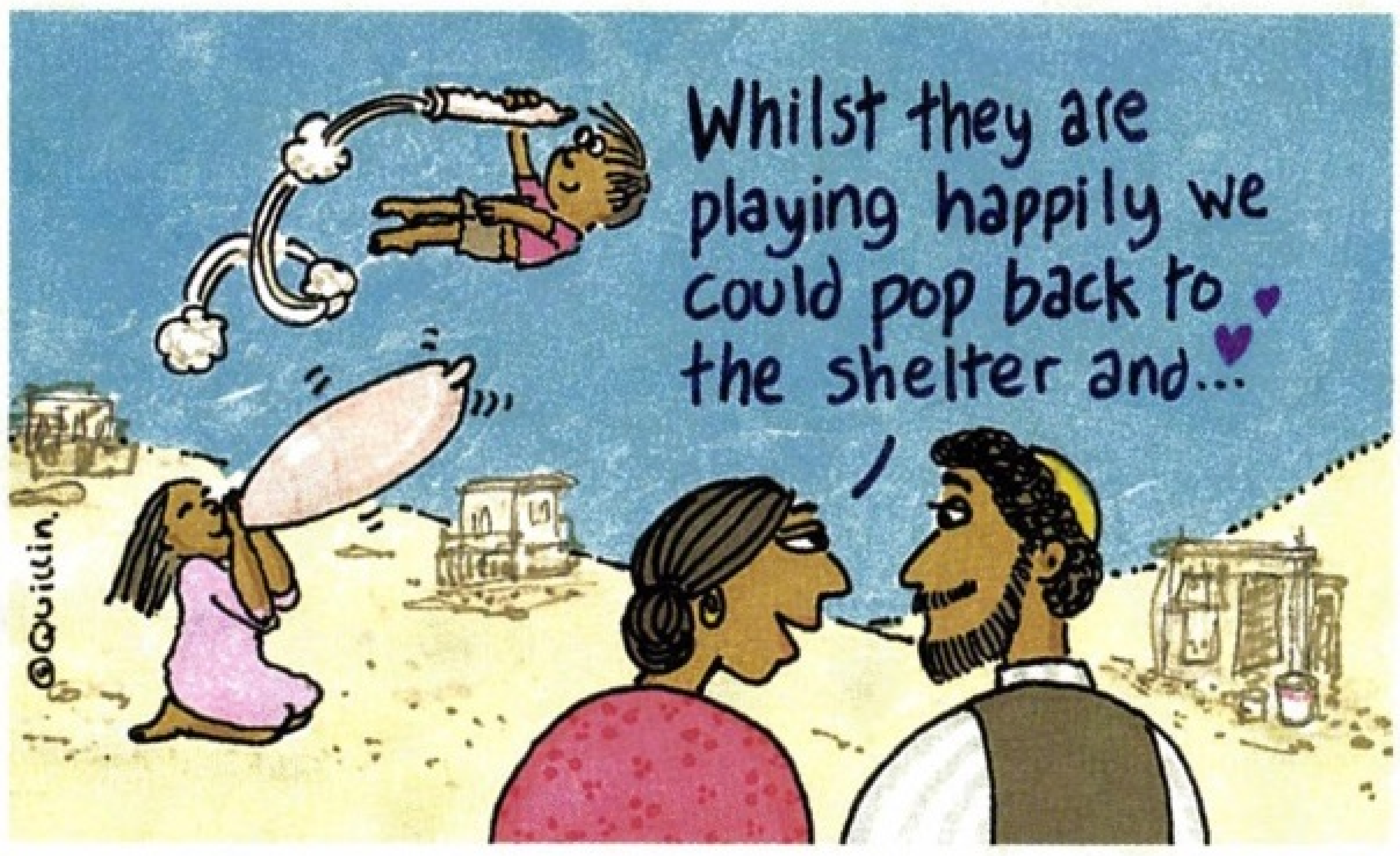
## Inflated condoms

I have a picturesque memory of Afghan refugee children playing with long pink balloons: an entertaining and thoughtful gift from the Western-run population control agencies to the father-of-ten camp residents. As well as offering astonishing insights into the lengths to which condoms can be inflated, the scene appears to highlight a few differences in outlook between giver and receivers.

It is not difficult to prove to anyone that condoms can be used to prevent disease, or worse still, babies, which so many persist in regarding as precious assets; whether this knowledge can affect the blend of love, hope, poverty, expectations, needs and values which constitute human sexuality is another matter.

And what does the Pope have to say about this? Unfortunately we will never know. He was tried without defence by a kangaroo court (***In the Dock* NI 275**) and forthwith stabbed to death with the pens of righteous journalists (or is that just a bit of unsubstantiated opinion posing as reportage?).

**Mary-ann Laarveld**
Devon, England



Whilst they are playing happily we could pop back to the shelter and...
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VIV QUILLIN

## Acquired tastes

Bim Prodhan (*Letters* **NI 273**) complains that fairly traded coffee should taste better than other coffees as well as merely appealing to the conscience of consumers.

Although it is true that the first fairly traded coffee was not high quality, this is certainly not true of products like Café Direct. It may not taste exactly the same as Nescafé or Kenco or whatever your unfairly traded brand is, but it tastes at least as good (as well as satisfying your conscience!). I would be surprised if anyone liked coffee the first time they drank it as it is an acquired taste – so why not give fairly traded coffee the same chance?

**Edward Richards**
Manchester, England

## Animal activists

I would like to respond to Eileen Davies' derisive and dismissive aside on Animal Liberation Front activists in her letter on abortion (**NI 273**).

These brave and compassionate people have the greatest love and respect for the whole of creation. They are prepared to sacrifice themselves to a far greater extent than salaried RSPCA officers and their whole lives are lived with a view to limiting as far as possible the destructive effects of human selfishness, arrogance and indifference.

Whilst the reactionary hysteria to their activities is only to be expected, it should be deplored. And whilst women such as Ms Davies feel confident to sneer so smugly at them in public, I would like here to express my admiration, gratitude and undying support for their courageous and compassionate actions.

**Rosalind Fisher**
London, England

## Chernobyl

On April 26th 1996 it will be the 10th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. Could you do an issue on it? Perhaps I've missed something – but I haven't seen a word in your pages about it except in the Ukraine *Country Profile* (**NI 269**).

There is a conspiracy of silence about what is by far the world's worst environmental disaster. And why? Because if the public knew the truth, the nuclear industry would be dead.

**Dr Sally Reynolds**
Abingdon, Oxon, England

**Ed:** We haven't done a whole issue on nuclear power, but you will find an *Update* and a *Letter from Belarus* about Chernobyl in this magazine.

## The NI Quotes book

Have you got any favourite quotes? We're looking for quotable quotes for a new small book, and we'd love to include your suggestions. We're particularly keen to find words of wisdom and colourful views on life, humour, politics and the environment, especially from developing countries. If you can help please send to: **Troth Wells, NI, 55 Rectory Road, Oxford OX4 1BW or e-mail: newint@gn.apc.org**

**The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the New Internationalist.**

LETTER FROM **BELARUS**

# Ghosts in a purple land

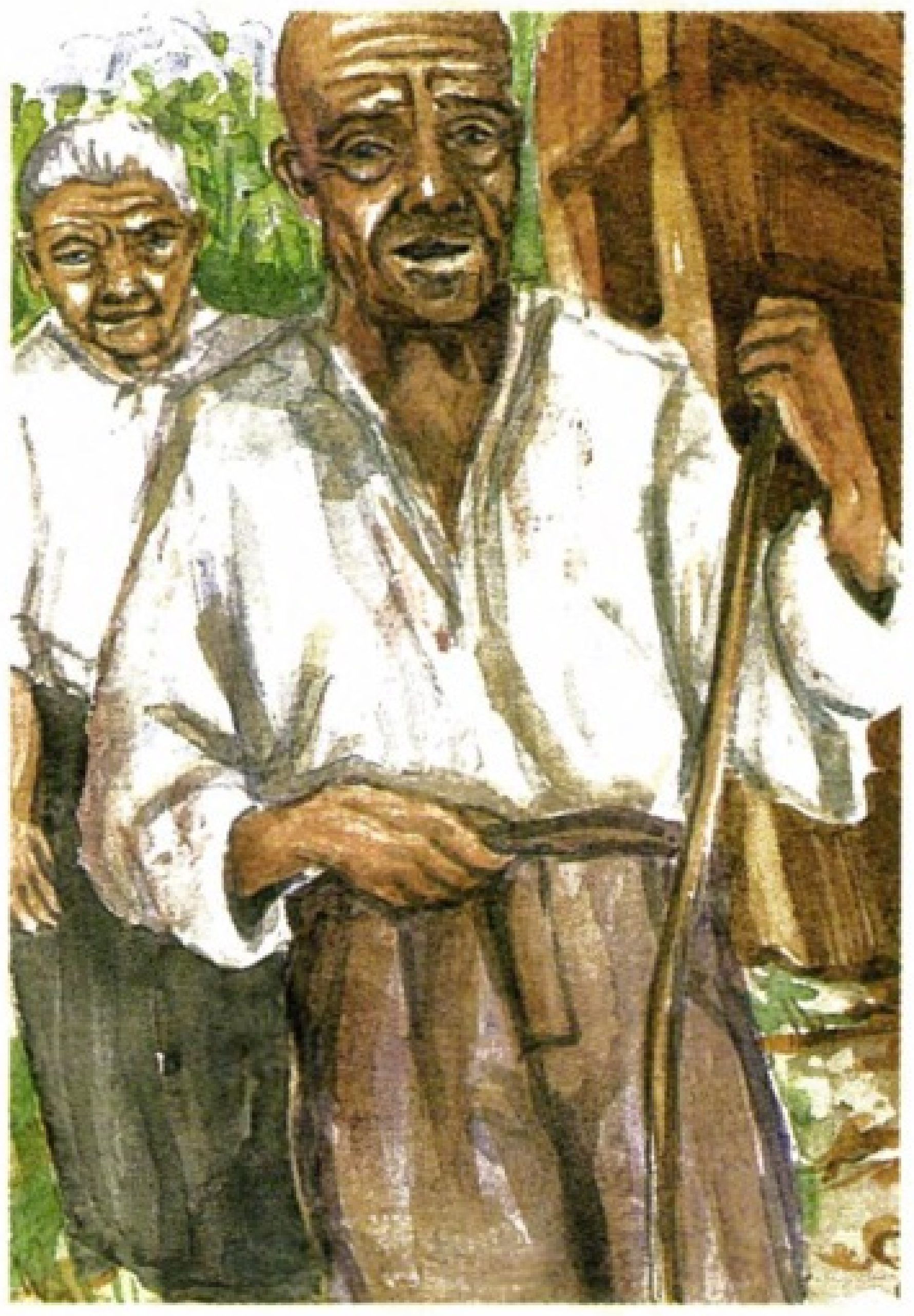
On the tenth anniversary of the nuclear accident, **Olivia Ward** travels into the contaminated zone around Chernobyl.

It was a picture-perfect ghost town, a small punctuation mark on a dusty road to nowhere.

But as we heaved the clapped-out Zaparozhets vehicle along narrow lanes overgrown with lilac blossoms, we were suddenly aware that not all the ghosts had departed.

A man whose face sagged like an ancient leather duffle-bag was staring at us with equal disbelief. In one hand he held a makeshift hoe, in the other the top of his trousers. As our eyes met we both flinched, as though I had intruded on a private scene, or he had been caught trespassing by strangers.

'Wait a minute,' he muttered. 'I'll get my wife.'


MIRIAM McCURDY

As his blackened feet disappeared into the tumble-down wooden cottage I glanced at my map. The tiny village of Bartolomeyeka, 170 kilometres north of Chernobyl, was clearly marked. It was outlined in brilliant purple, as were all the surrounding areas deep inside the Contaminated Zone created ten years ago by the invisible death rays of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

If I were in any doubt about the extent of the pollution, a young soldier a few kilometres down the road set me straight, waving his machine gun toward the gateway of the forbidden area. The road was closed 'officially', he said. But if we were so reckless and headstrong, well, he had done his duty. We passed him in a cloud of gritty dust. Unsettlingly, no cars followed us and we met none on the road.

A ragged elderly woman now stood in front of me, grinning in toothless amusement. What brought us to her village, she wondered, when even her own children and grandchildren refused to visit?

In the garden behind the house her husband was beckoning shyly. 'We have no proper clothes,' said Anyuta Popkov, jerking her head toward her husband's tattered and buttonless trousers, 'because officially we don't exist.'

The solid little woman shook with laughter, her voice deep and hoarse enough to fill the empty street where once her neighbours had bickered and hugged.

'You know what we say? This radiation stuff doesn't exist.'

'How could we tell there was anything wrong?' said Anyuta. 'We just went about our business and it rained and rained. We saw yellow puddles on the ground and journalists came and looked at them. They tried to create a panic but we didn't listen.'

The Popkov's two daughters did, and so did most of their neighbours. Poor but never hungry or homeless, they found themselves in a cramped communal flat provided by the Government in a drab provincial town.

Before they left they had watched armed Government troops destroy their cows and chickens. The village was closed off and soldiers posted to stop people returning.

Most took the warning. But the Popkovs took their few worldly goods, climbed into a bus and rode back to the home where they had lived for nearly 50 years. They walked in under cover of darkness, like fugitives returning to the scene of a crime.

A bitter tide of history moved for them. Belarus, which bore the brunt of the Chernobyl fallout, was swept into post-communist collapse. With almost no outside aid, the Government struggled with massive new healthcare costs. In the face of such panoramic problems, two stubborn peasant farmers escaped attention.

In their village's silence the Popkovs mourned for their vanished family and friends. Then they settled down to the rest of their lives, shuffling back in time to the existence of their forebears, without electricity, gas or running water.

I could scarcely imagine the endless winters the two old companions spent in the draughty cottage. He chopping logs for the huge ceramic fireplace that supplied their only heat, she knitting and mending with scraps of material scavenged from abandoned houses.

And food? I hardly dared ask. But Ivan led me gleefully into the lush garden, where neat rows of vegetables popped up in defiance of nuclear physics. Defying the odds was the obsession of their lives now, their only purpose. Each year lived, a small but perfect triumph of denial and survival.

'Can you see or feel this radiation?' said Anyuta. 'Of course not.'

She patted Ivan's grimy shoulder. 'I can feel that. People think we're just stupid farmers. But we're human beings. At the end of our lives, there's nothing else.' ■

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**Olivia Ward** is bureau chief for the *Toronto Star* in Moscow.

# Update

PALESTINE ELECTIONS

## Limited franchise

### Women's hopes disappointed

ETIDAL SILWAN straightened her simple black *hijab* and gave the ballot box she guarded a proprietary pat. She was in charge of registering voters for the first Palestinian elections in her home, Jalazon Refugee Camp. As the hour approached for the polls to close, she noted with satisfaction that almost 70 per cent of the camp's voters had been in to cast their ballots.

**Casting vote?: women made up 42 per cent of voters but four per cent of candidates.**

ANDREA KÜNZIG

A majority of voters, she reported, were women – and she wasn't surprised: 'Women are much more concerned about these things. Women make things happen here.'

'The *intifada* (the popular uprising against Israeli occupation that began in 1987) did a lot for women here,' says Suheir Azzouni, Director of the Women's Technical Committee, the umbrella organization of Palestinian women's groups. When men were arrested or imprisoned many women became household heads, were forced to get jobs or to resist Israeli troops physically. Traditional ideas about women's roles began to change. Many feminists, says Azzouni, thought the elections would reflect the contribution Palestinian women have made to the fight against the Israeli occupation.

That was the plan. And Etidal may have been right that women are concerned – they formed 42 per cent of the voters. But they made up only four per cent of the 688 candidates and won only five of the 88 seats on the new legislative Council. According to election observers in the villages, many women voters were illiterate and let male relatives vote for them; some said they were voting for the candidates their husband had picked, and some men would not allow their wives to vote at all.

Candidates like Hanan Ashrawi – the former Palestinian spokesperson who was one of five women elected – with her Western suits and flawless English, have little in common with the women of Jalazon camp. The 'average' Palestinian woman lives in a rural village or refugee camp, has six children and works the family's land. She has no independent income. Twenty-five per cent of Palestinian women are estimated to be illiterate and effectively disenfranchized.

Much will depend, says Azzouni, on the concessions that the Palestinian leadership is willing to make to appease its Islamic opposition, which wants Muslim *Sharia* law in the place of the current secular laws: 'If the Authority is going to worry about what *Hamas* thinks, we will not see any progress. And women's situation may deteriorate.'

Hanan Ashrawi rejects the idea that the women's movement has anything to fear from the Islamic parties. Gender equality is enshrined in the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, she argues, and it is not realistic to think the Palestinian Authority would replace its basic laws with Islamic ones. She and the new female Council members say they are making it a priority to put through legislation on compulsory education for girls, on early marriage and domestic violence. But it will take a long time – even if it gets through – to filter down to Etidal and the women of Jalazon. ■

**Stephanie Nolen**

## Tale

**An ancient people**
**tired of their language**
**– or so it was told –**
**decided to raise a hill.**
**They piled up earth**
**as high as the clouds.**

**Up there – it was told –**
**they handed out languages.**

**I wanted like mad to go up there –**
**you had to knock back a few strong drinks,**
**and you came down talking nonsense**
**in another language!**

**Humberto Ak'abal**
**Translated by Sarah Arvio**

Humberto Ak'abal is a Guatemalan poet who writes in the Maya language which, like the Maya people, has been repressed for centuries.

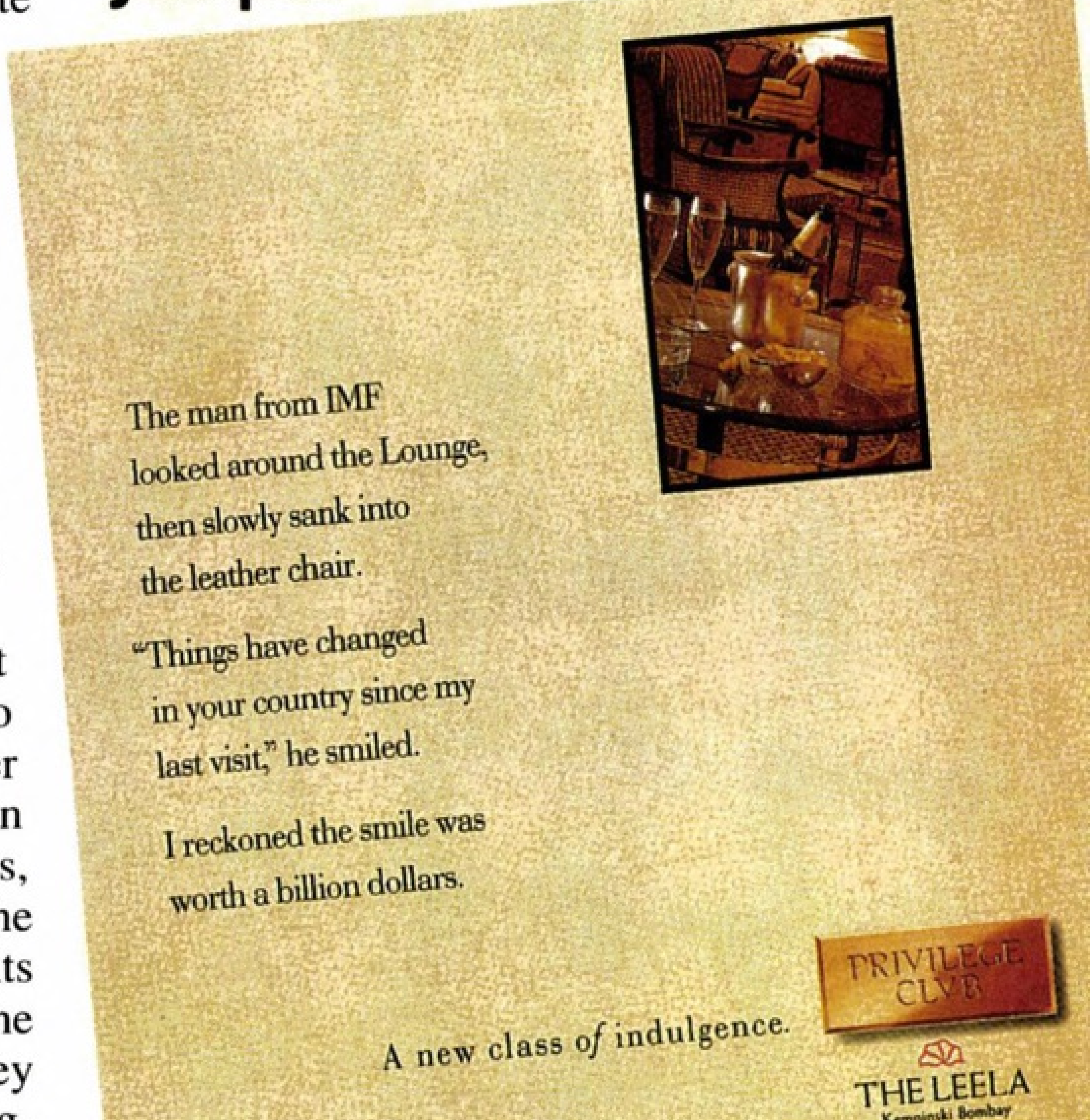
Source: *Index on Censorship*, No 168

## Disabled funds

**The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that around 370 million people, or seven per cent of the world's population, has some kind of disability, of whom 80 million require rehabilitation services. No more than ten per cent of disabled people, however, have access to such services in developing countries. Mr Bengt Lindqvist, a former Minister for Social Affairs in Sweden who is himself blind, recently led an international delegation to the WHO to express mounting concern that international funds for rehabilitation are nonetheless shrinking.**

Source: press release WHO/6

## Jackpot



The man from IMF
looked around the Lounge,
then slowly sank into
the leather chair.

"Things have changed
in your country since my
last visit," he smiled.

I reckoned the smile was
worth a billion dollars.

A new class *of* indulgence.

PRIVILEGE
CLVB

THE LEELA
Kempinski Bombay

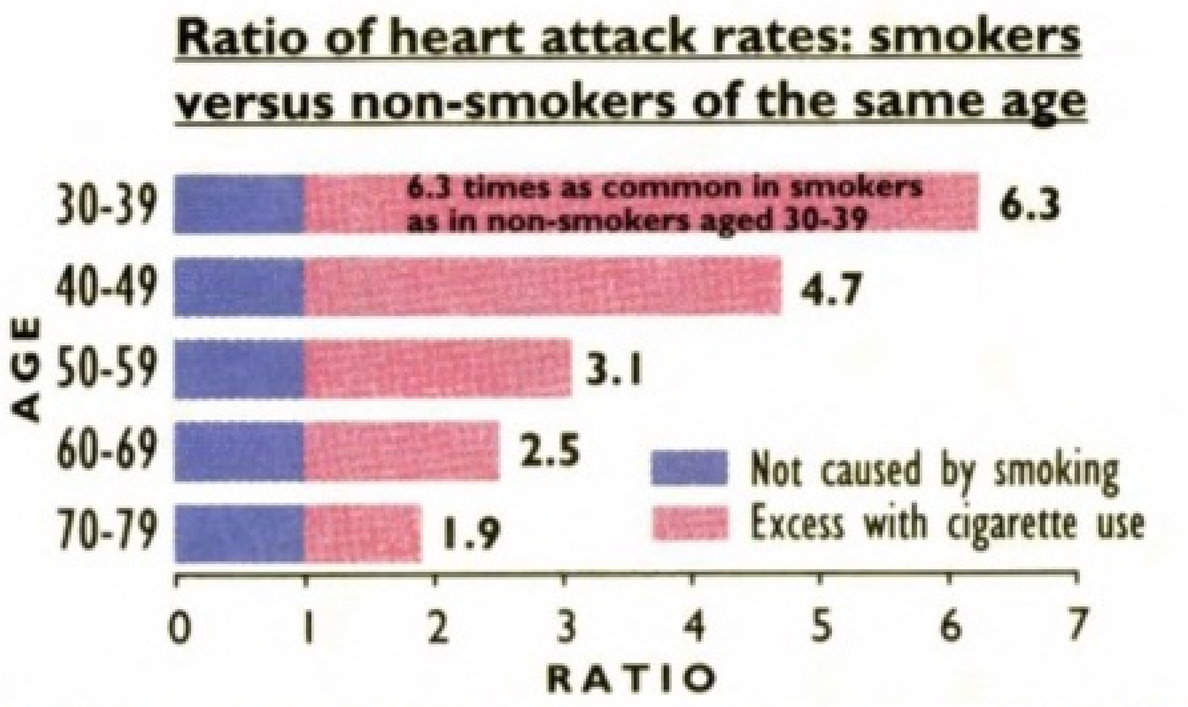
For reservations, call: The Leela, Bombay: 836 3636. The Leela Beach, Goa: 74 6363/6373. Delhi: 332 5553/54.
Ahmedabad: 642 0925. Bangalore: 556 4525. Madras: 827 5191. Poona: 63 0544. Calcutta: 247 5290.

From an advertisement for luxury hotels in *India Today*, Vol 21 No 2

## Smokescreen...

**British supermarket giant Tesco launched its own cigarettes under the brand name Benington, the first time in its history that it has given one of its products a different brand name. The launch happened quietly – there was no advertising. Could this have something to do with Tesco's 'Healthy Eating' promotions, celebrating their tenth birthday last year? Or the fact that most of its leaflets urge customers to give up smoking. When asked how Benington cigarettes fitted in with its healthy-lifestyle approach, a spokesperson for the company said that it was not their policy to dictate the lifestyle of their customers but rather to provide the information they needed to make informed choices. Aahhhh....**

Source: *Consumer Currents* No 180



Ratio of heart attack rates: smokers versus non-smokers of the same age

Based on the ISIS study of over 10,000 UK heart attacks (*British Medical Journal*, 19 August 1995)

## ...for attacks

**For those who do choose to smoke, here's some more information to help them review their choice. While the link between smoking and lung cancer is well established, a study published in the *British Medical Journal* states that heart attacks are the main way tobacco kills young adults, and cigarettes also cause many non-fatal attacks. The study conducted, using data from over 14,000 British heart-attack survivors, claims that when a cigarette smoker in their thirties or forties has a heart attack, there's an 80-per-cent chance that tobacco caused it. People in these age groups are five times more likely to have an attack if they are smokers than if they are not.**

Source: *WHO Tobacco Alert*

## Tower of bubble

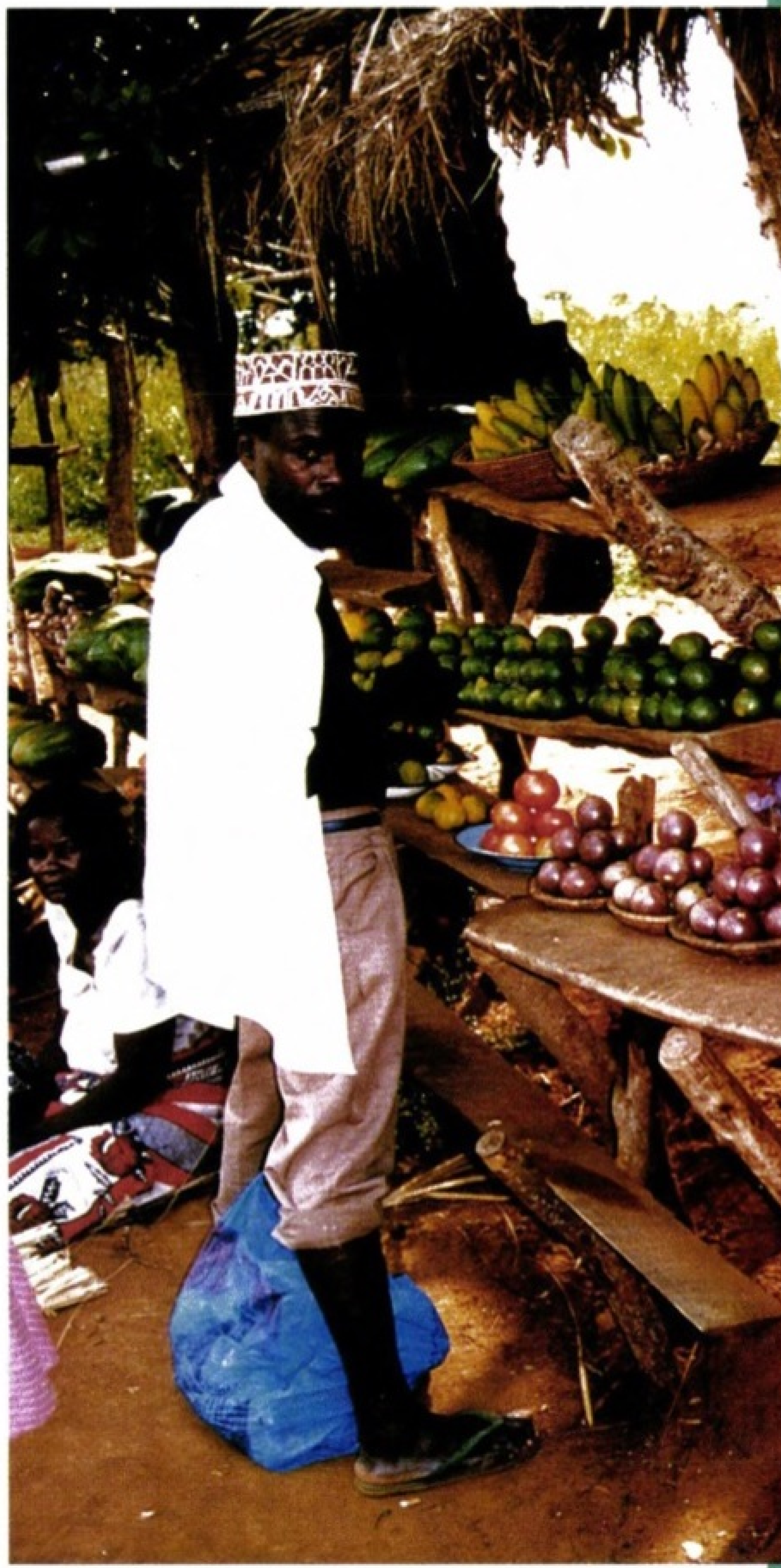
**Some 200 homeless people living in an underground passage near Tokyo's JR Shinjuku station are being pressured to move out so that a 'moving sidewalk' can be installed in their place. Shinjuku is one of Tokyo's major centres, offering easy access to jobs, medical care and food for the homeless. It is also the site of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's new administrative building complex, known as the 'Tower of Bubble' because of the huge sums spent on its twin towers during Tokyo's 'bubble' property boom. Two attempts to evict the homeless people last December failed, but the Tokyo Metropolitan Government still refused to consider any dialogue with them.**

Source: *Ampo, Japan-Asia Quarterly Review*, Vol 26, No 4

UGANDA

# Dreams without means

### War years take their toll



**Making the market in Kampala: more variety, less security.**

LORNA REAY

YOU could win a packet of biscuits or a loaf of bread in Uganda's National Lottery. Yes, there are money prizes too, but nobody scoffs at winning a carton of milk or a piece of cheese. Now the world's fourth-poorest country, Uganda is struggling to rebuild itself after more than 20 years of chaos, bloodshed and fear.

Driving around Kampala, rarely stopping for traffic lights because the bulbs have been stolen, one is immediately impressed by the number of buildings under construction. Smart new hotels and office blocks seem to elbow aside the shabby, bullet-spattered walls and broken windows that are stark reminders of the country's recent past. People here remember the years between 1980 and 1985, when Obote was in power. Then, inter-tribal tensions made the city so unsafe that many people left altogether. Buying a new car or building a home meant inviting death by drawing attention to your wealth.

Now, under the Museveni administration, new businesses are starting up. Shops are stocked with a larger variety of goods than has been seen for years – but wrought-iron screens protect the windows. Uganda may have more banks than any other African country, but they all demand minimum deposits too large for small savers.

On the outskirts of Kampala, countless partially-built houses await the funds to finish them. Many of them are unlikely to be completed. They were owned by people with AIDS. Everything they had was put into the building, to leave to their children. Then, when they died, financial and legal complications robbed the orphans of their legacies. It is a sobering reminder that one in five people here have been diagnosed with the disease.

The Ugandan Government is in the throes of privatizing its assets, but there is a lack of financial expertise to work out the complex deals. According to local entrepreneur Cosmas Kimbugwe: 'What Uganda needs most is skilled people and teachers. During the war we lost so many of our educated people. There is very little training available here.'

For most children there is barely enough money even for primary education. Many children end up helping at home, or selling things on the streets, rather than attending school. Child soldiers who once wielded deadly weapons and learnt to be ruthless to survive are ill-equipped for living in a peaceful community.

Crime is rife. In the countryside gangs await passing vehicles to puncture their tyres and murder and rob the passengers. Vehicle owners often have an anti-hijack alarm fitted to the driver's door. In Kampala, those with property sleep more easily at night with dogs guarding their compound. Less dramatic but more common are thefts from electricity and phone lines by neighbours who tap in illegally.

There are many aid agencies working in Uganda, and together with the Government progress is being made. But it's going to be a long, tough road for the majority. The unfinished buildings are a silent testimony to their dreams as well as their lack of means. ■

**Lorna Reay**

# Update

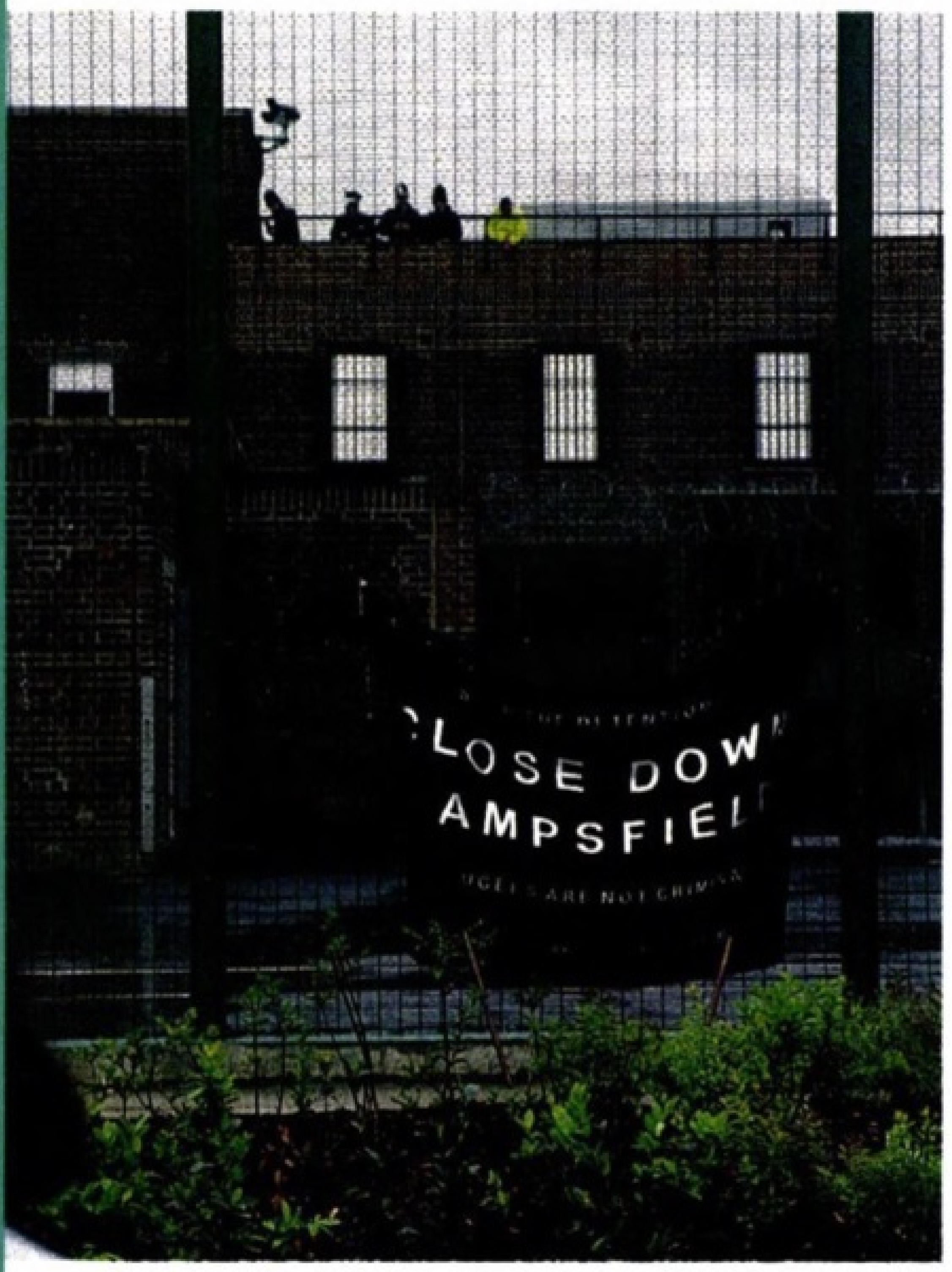
HUMAN RIGHTS

## Lost asylum

### Rule change in Britain leaves refugees destitute

JOHN* is a young Kenyan at Campsfield Detention Centre near Oxford, Britain. Mild-mannered and well-spoken, he has been there for some months. He has committed no crime; he is seeking asylum from persecution back home. His crime is simply to have arrived.

Since 5 February 1996 people in John's position who arrive at British ports or airports have been automatically barred from claiming even the most basic of welfare benefits. They are only entitled to such benefits if they claim *on arrival* that they are seeking asylum. At this point they are either incarcerated in prisons and detention centres like Campsfield to await a Home Office decision on their case, or are sent back to face the horrors from which they fled.



**Not a prison: Campsfield Detention Centre locks up the innocent.**

DAVID RANSOM

The Refugee Council estimates that 2,000 asylum-seekers have already been affected by the cut in benefits, with 2,700 more at risk with each month that passes.

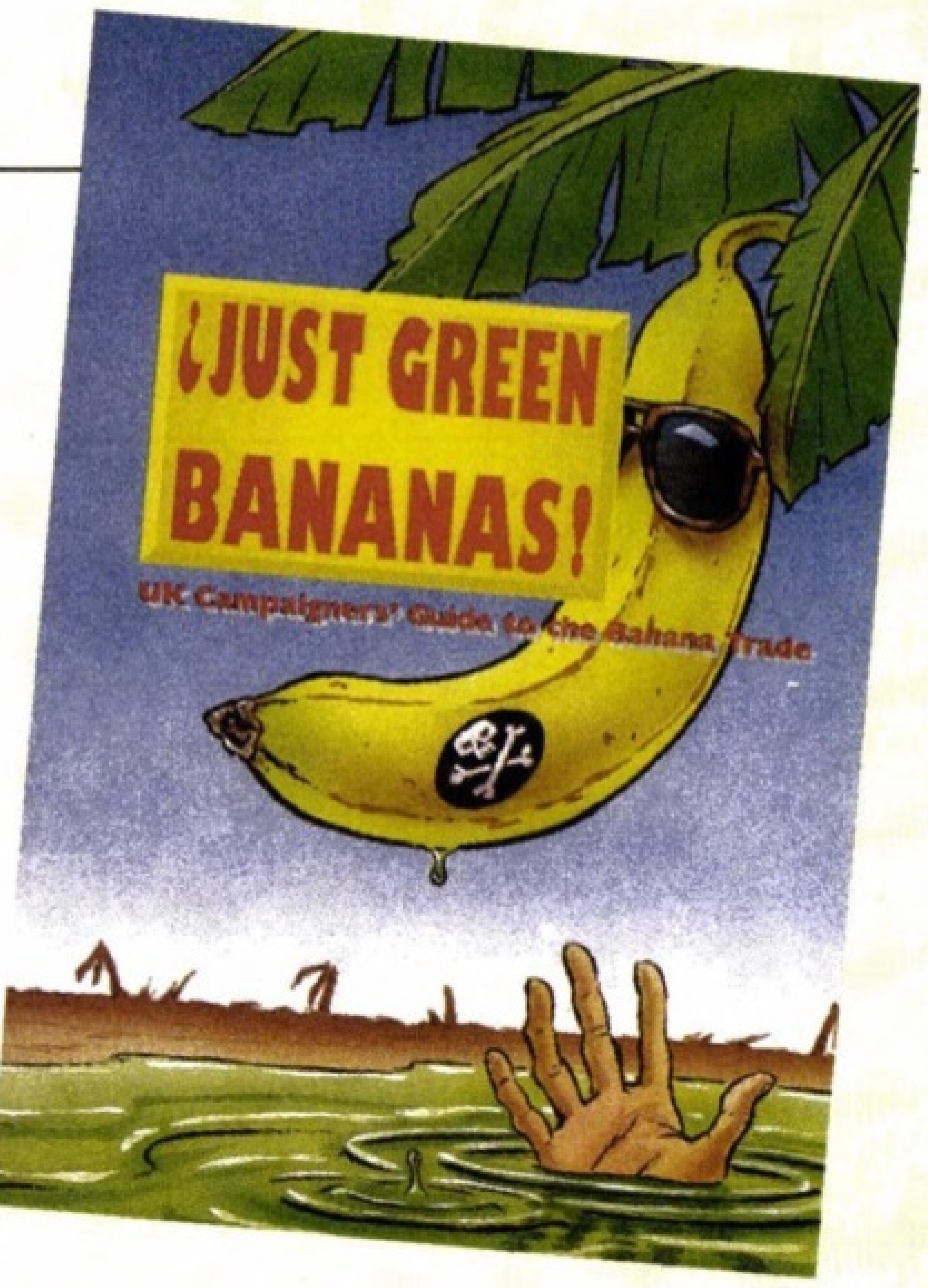
Even the Social Security Committee, a statutory body which advises the Secretary of State for Social Security, has pointed out that: 'The reality of the proposals is that thousands of men, women and children will be left with no means of providing themselves with food or shelter. Many will have no option but to live on the streets of our major cities and ports.'

At present the average waiting time for an appeal is estimated to be between 14 and 21 months. And they have little hope of being granted asylum in any case. Refusal rates have soared from 17 per cent in 1990 to 75 per cent in 1994. The Government has a 'white list' of countries where it considers there is 'no serious risk of persecution' – and therefore no grounds for asylum. This list includes Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, India, Pakistan, Ghana and Cyprus. It has now been extended to include Tanzania, Ethiopia – and Kenya.

Back at Campsfield, John has heard about the benefit cuts. I tell him that Kenya has just been put on the 'white list'. He looks incredulous, and then worried. He has good reason to be so. 'White list' countries have a 98-100 per cent refusal rate. After his months of waiting, John's stark choice may be between returning to face danger in Kenya – or a life of destitution in Britain. ■

**Maria Spiers**

* a pseudonym


¡JUST GREEN BANANAS!
UK Campaigners' Guide to the Banana Trade

### Banana barter

**Some 8,000 'Give Fair Trade Bananas a Fair Chance' postcards have been received by Franz Fischler in the European Union Agricultural Directorate in Brussels, and another 4,000 by Douglas Hogg in the British Ministry of Agriculture. The cards have come from places as far afield as Kenya, Costa Rica, France and Zimbabwe. They form part of a campaign to get the principles of fair trade, and an identifying label, recognized by the banana industry and by the rules of the World Trade Organization.**

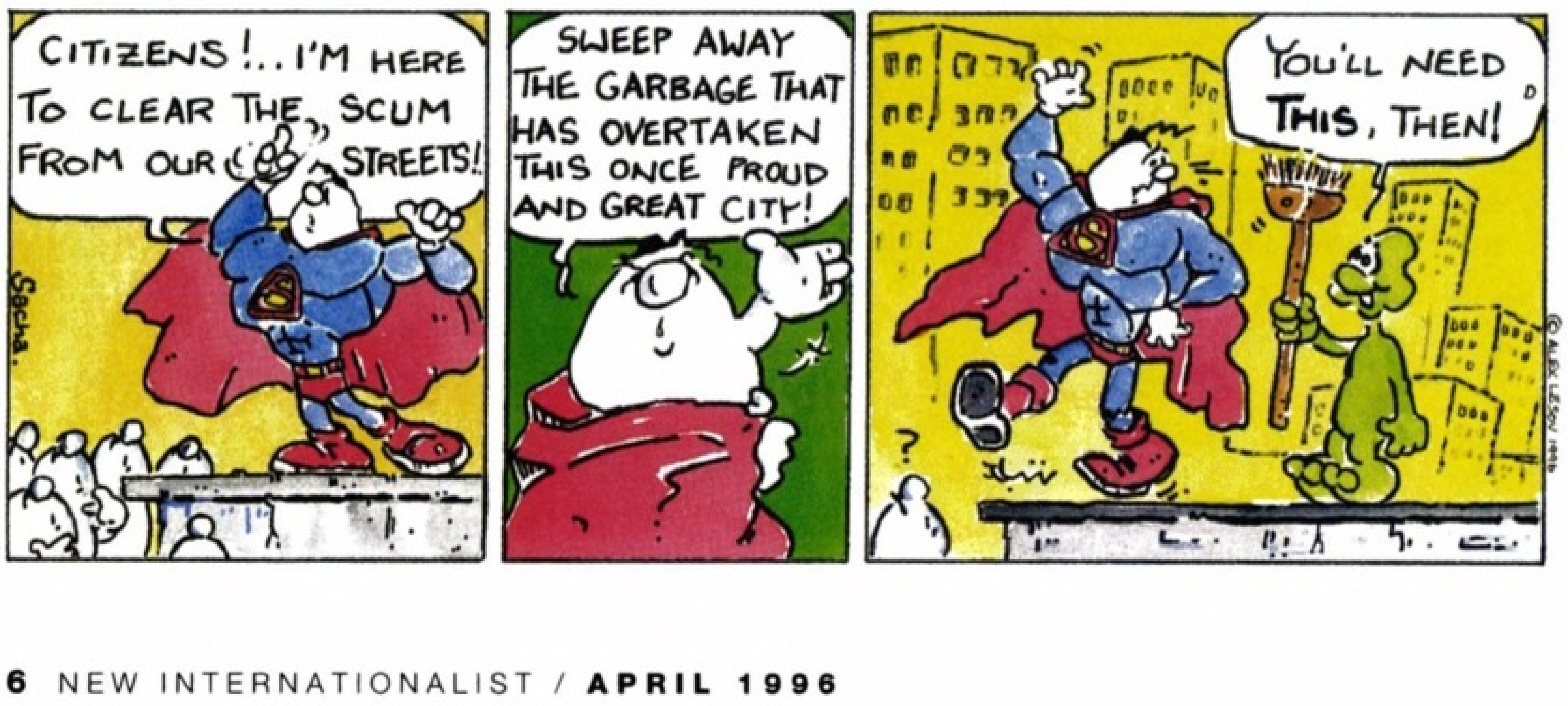
Source: Farmers' Link, 38-40 Exchange Street, Norwich NR2 1AX, Britain

### Clown care

**Is laughter the best cure? For the next year a group of American paediatricians will be trying to find out whether humour helps the healing process. They will measure the effects on their young patients of magic, mime and music as dispensed by the 35 clowns of the Big Apple Circus. The Circus's Clown Care Unit has been sending clowns into six New York hospitals for three days a week for nearly ten years. Parents and staff are convinced they help sick and anxious children. Researchers are now looking for scientific proof.**

Source: *New Scientist*, No 2016

## Chlorophyll by Sacha

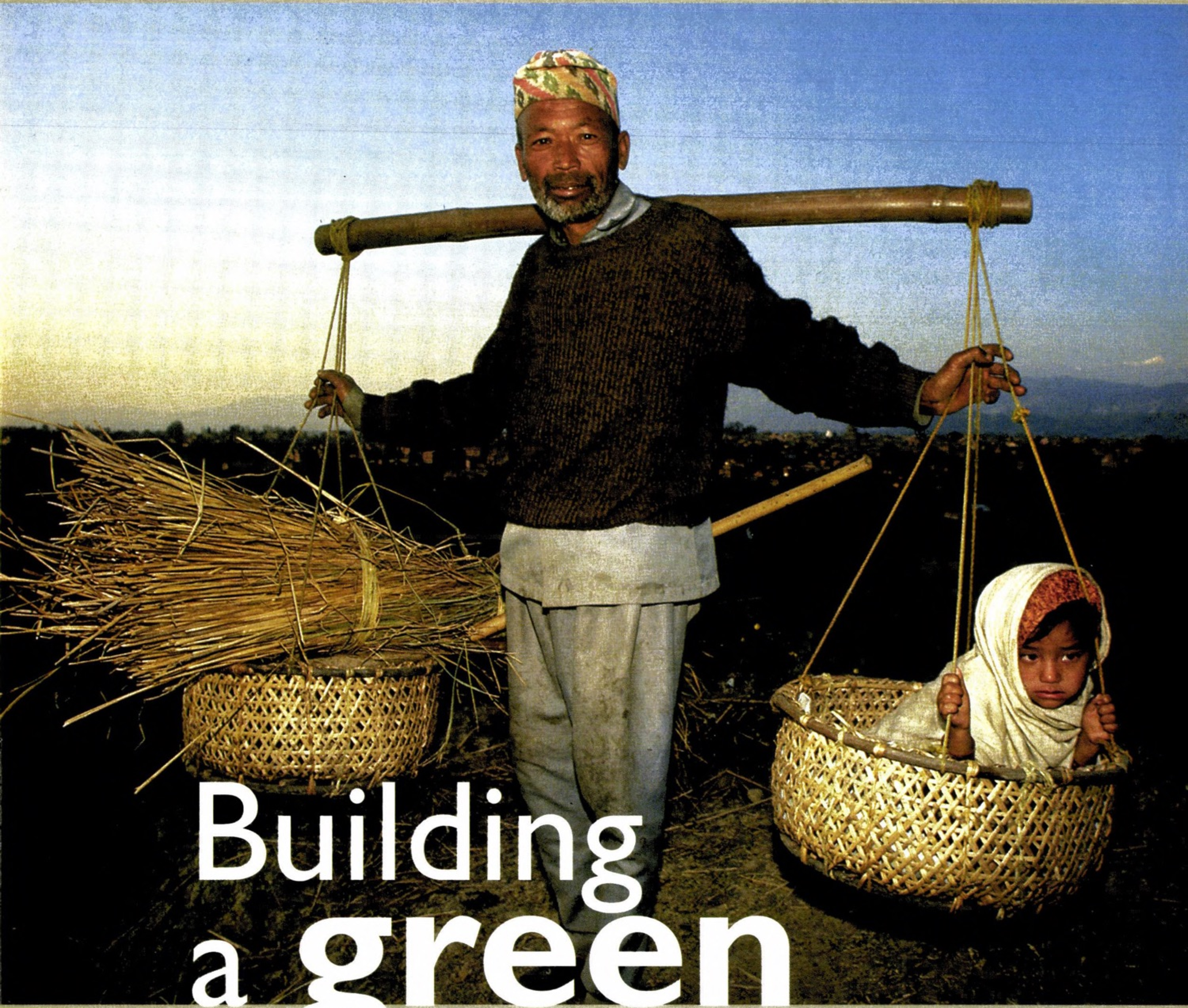

CITIZENS!.. I'M HERE TO CLEAR THE SCUM FROM OUR STREETS!
SWEEP AWAY THE GARBAGE THAT HAS OVERTAKEN THIS ONCE PROUD AND GREAT CITY!
YOU'LL NEED THIS, THEN!
Sacha

# Quote

**'The World Bank has to accept that its real instrument of torture is its insistence on growth, its economic theorizing at the expense of human welfare...**

**The sooner debtor nations realize the political nature of the World Bank, the sooner they will be able to face the bogus economic theories of the Bank with an equivalent weapon – people's power.'**

**Ken Saro-Wiwa**, Nigerian dissident and environmentalist, hanged by the Nigerian military dictatorship.



# Building a green economy

The global economy is going from bad to worse and the old solutions don't seem to work any more. Is there a better way? **Wayne Ellwood** reports.

More and more these days I get the feeling that something is wrong. It's an odd sense of unease, a dim registering that the world is 'out-of-joint' as Shakespeare might have put it. It happened most recently on a trip to my local corner store in Toronto, a family-owned greengrocer where the *signora* always gives me a welcome smile and her husband invariably drops cigarette ash onto the check-out counter as I pay for my milk or cold-cuts.

Today, when I ask him if the local strawberries have come in yet, he gives me a shrug and mumbles: 'Too expensive. California strawberries are cheaper and they last longer.' This seems odd to me but I let it pass and don't really start to put the

PHOTOS: HARMUT SCHWARZBACH (PREVIOUS PAGE): JECKO VASSILEV (RIGHT) / STILL PICTURES

pieces together until I'm fumbling around for a few cloves of garlic and notice the words 'Product of China' on the side of the box. China. This gives me pause: from where I'm standing China is approximately 15,000 miles away. These little, white bulbs have been harvested, transported overland, packed and shipped across the Pacific Ocean, then freighted three-quarters of the way across North America. It's at moments like these that the spectacular lunacy of the global economy comes crashing in on me.

California strawberries and Chinese garlic have muscled local produce out of the market for one reason only: they're cheaper. And in terms of actual cash out of my pocket here-and-now that's true. Economists argue that consumers like me are simply maximizing self-interest by buying from more efficient – ie cheaper – producers. That's the reason Chilean grapes fill supermarket shelves in Minneapolis and Dutch butter is half the price of local butter in Kenya.

*What's efficient in market terms is damaging and costly in other ways*

But this word 'efficiency' is a double-edged sword. In fact, what's efficient in market terms is almost always damaging and costly in other ways – to employment, to social cohesion and to the environment. That's because the real costs of getting those mutant California berries onto breakfast tables in Montreal and Philadelphia are hidden. Or as economists would say, 'externalized'.

Modern industrial agriculture is based on cheap, non-renewable fossil fuel: to run tractors and harvesters, to produce pesticides and fertilizers and to transport produce to market. That massive subsidy is not factored into final food costs any more than are the environmental costs of this high-tech approach to farming. Increased output per hectare over the last 50 years has come with a steep price: soil erosion, groundwater pollution, salinization of soils and diminished genetic diversity, to say nothing of the carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases vented into the atmosphere. And this is a vicious circle. When soil fertility declines more fertilizer has to be dumped onto fields just to maintain yields. At the moment half the fertilizer used on US farmland is to replace nutrients lost to soil erosion.

So much for the hoopla about the 'efficiency' of the market. Ecologist and business consultant Paul Hawken argues that markets are good at setting prices but lousy at recognizing costs because they give us the wrong information. 'Whenever an organism gets wrong information, it is a form of toxicity,' writes Hawken. 'A herbicide kills because it is a hormone that tells the plant to grow faster than its capacity to absorb nutrients allows. It literally grows itself to death... Our daily doses of toxicity are the prices in the marketplace.'[1] Hawken's metaphor is apt: industrial society, too, is literally growing itself to death.

That's because there is a basic, potentially lethal, flaw at the heart of today's market-based economics. The varied and complex natural ecosystems, on which all life depends and on which the human economy is based, are treated as both limitless and, for the most part, free. The more oil we pump from the ground, the more forests we clear-cut, the more land we till, the more minerals we blast from the earth, the more the economy grows – and the richer we become. At least that's the theory. Except that as every economist knows, treating capital as current income is a recipe for disaster. Any business that operated along those lines would soon be bankrupt. For production to be sustainable, capital that is consumed (depreciated) must be replaced by investing some of the production. It's only what's left after this investment that can be counted as income.

A century ago this destruction of natural capital wasn't such a problem. The earth's bounty seemed infinite and its natural systems resilient enough to absorb whatever waste we could throw at them. That situation has changed dramatically over the last four decades. Since 1950 global economic output has jumped from \$3.8 trillion to \$18.9 trillion, a nearly five-fold increase.[2] We have consumed more of the world's natural wealth in this brief period than in the entire history of humankind.

And the great god growth continues to hold sway at the centre of economic policy. Every year at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the world's financial leaders, in a spasm of myopic optimism, close ranks in their quest for renewed economic growth. This year Renato Ruggiero, Director-General of the new World Trade Organization, stressed the need for a 'universal system of free trade' which would be an 'unprecedented force for economic growth, for both rich industrial countries and the developing world'.

CARTOON: TED RALL

More waste than nature can handle: a young boy strains to wrench his trapped leg from the contaminated waste of an open-caste copper mine in Bulgaria.

What's so depressing about this view is that it is widely shared by the power élite. There are few politicians, trade-union leaders or business bosses advocating anything other than growth as the key to prosperity and the solution to global poverty. Yet there is irrefutable evidence that growth is not the solution but the core of the problem. A central assumption of economists on both the Left and the Right has been that the 'carrying capacity' of the earth is infinitely expandable. A combination of human ingenuity and advanced technology will allow us all, eventually, to live like middle-class Americans – if only we can control our impatience and keep the economy growing.

Unfortunately, reality shows otherwise. It's clear there are limits to growth – and there is startling evidence that we've already breached them. According to University of British Columbia ecologist William Rees: 'Total consumption by the human economy already exceeds natural income; humankind is both liquidating natural capital and destroying our real wealth-creating potential. In this light, efforts to expand our way to sustainability through deregulation and trade can only accelerate global decline.'[3]

It is now estimated that 40 per cent of what ecologists call the 'net primary production' (NPP) of the earth's natural ecosystems is diverted to human activities. If global economic growth continues at the current rate and the earth's population doubles in the next 35 years (as would happen at the current pace) human beings, one species out of millions, would corral 80 per cent of NPP for their own use. Of course in some ways that's pure speculation. For the simple reason that a combination of environmental and social collapse will almost certainly kick in before we ever reach that point.

The iconoclastic American economist Herman Daly argues that we have moved from an 'empty world' to a 'full' one in what amounts to an historical eye-blink. But it is politically convenient, Daly says, not to admit to problems of carrying capacity because that would imply a limit to growth. And if growth is limited, Daly continues, 'then poverty must be dealt with, either by redistribution or by population control, both of which are taboo'.[4]

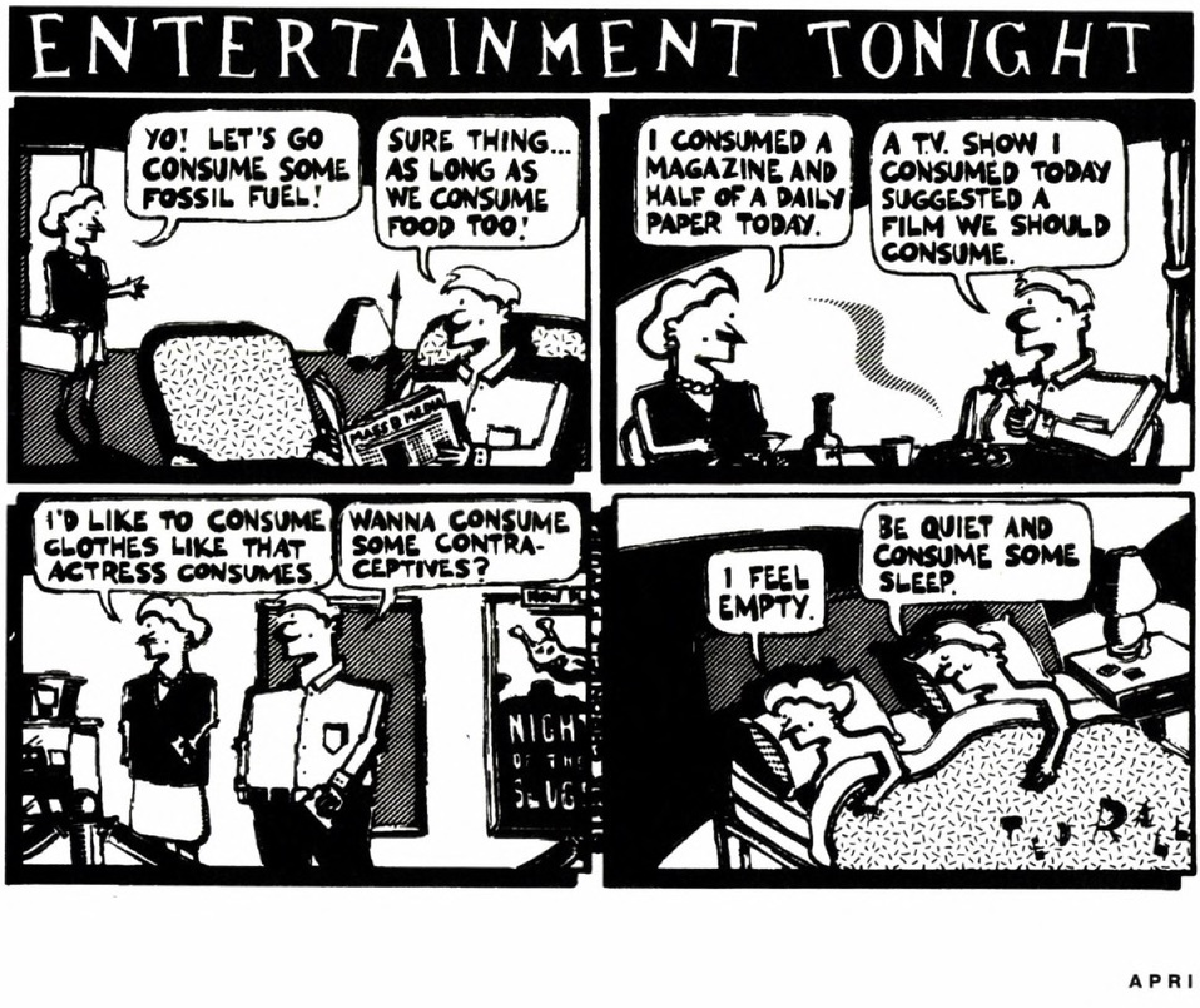
**The production of goods and services cannot be detached easily from biophysical reality**

In his pioneering work on what he calls our 'ecological footprint', William Rees estimates that four-to-six hectares of land are needed to maintain the consumption of the average person in the West. Yet in 1990 the total available productive land in the world was an estimated 1.7 hectares per person. The difference Rees calls 'appropriated carrying capacity'. The Netherlands, for example, consumes the output of a productive land mass 14 times its size. Most Northern countries and many urban regions in the South already consume more than their fair share, depending on trade or natural capital depletion for their survival. Such regions, Rees says, 'run an unaccounted ecological deficit – their populations either appropriating carrying capacity from elsewhere or from future generations'.[5] There are other more resonant names for this process, imperialism being the most obvious.

We don't have to search far for proof that growth-centred economics is pushing the regenerative capacities of the earth's ecosystems to the brink. The worry is not the one raised by the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* report of 20 years ago. There is no immediate shortage of basic non-renewable resources. Even at current rates of consumption there is enough copper, iron and fossil fuels to last centuries. More pressing is the concern that those basic life-support systems which we take for granted – the water cycle, the composition of the atmosphere, the changing seasons, the assimilation of waste and the recycling of nutrients, the pollination of crops, the delicate interplay of species – are everywhere on the verge of disintegration.

There is a now a large, unimpeachable body of research documenting this precipitous decline. Deserts are spreading, forests being hacked down, fertile soils ruined by erosion and salinization, fisheries exhausted and ground-water reserves pumped dry. Carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere due to our extravagant burning of fossil fuels continue to rise. On average we deposit 5.6 pounds of pure carbon into the atmosphere with every gallon of gasoline we burn – nearly six billion tons a year in total. And that doesn't include the estimated one to two tons released into the atmosphere every year from burning forests and grasslands. In September 1995 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a select group of nearly 2,500 climate scientists, stated baldly that climate change is unstoppable and will lead to 'widespread economic, social and environmental dislocation over the next century'. Meanwhile, oceanographers examining deep ocean sediments have confirmed that rapid, unpredictable shifts in climate can take place in as little as three or four decades.

So it seems the production of goods and services in the human economy cannot be detached easily from biophysical reality. Yet the powerful myth that more production and greater consumption equals

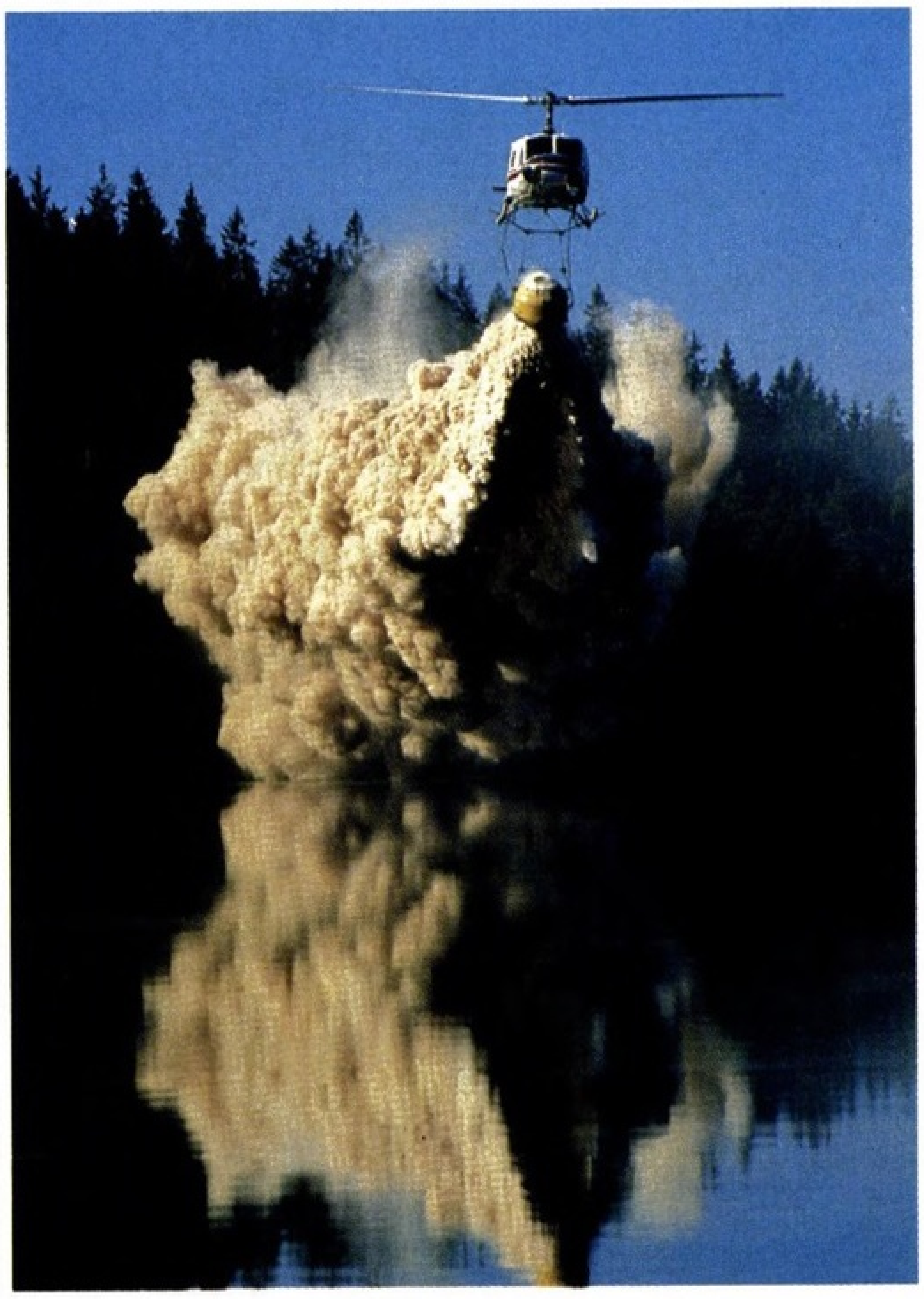

ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT
YO! LET'S GO CONSUME SOME FOSSIL FUEL!
SURE THING... AS LONG AS WE CONSUME FOOD TOO!
MASS MEDIA
I CONSUMED A MAGAZINE AND HALF OF A DAILY PAPER TODAY.
A T.V. SHOW I CONSUMED TODAY SUGGESTED A FILM WE SHOULD CONSUME.
I'D LIKE TO CONSUME CLOTHES LIKE THAT ACTRESS CONSUMES.
WANNA CONSUME SOME CONTRA-CEPTIVES?
NIGHT OF THE SLUG
I FEEL EMPTY.
BE QUIET AND CONSUME SOME SLEEP.
T. RALL

Cartoon by Ted Rall

progress remains firmly entrenched. But 'progress' measured in this way is both relative and narrowly economistic. At the beginning of the industrial revolution in Britain the poet Oliver Goldsmith made an observation in verse that might just as easily apply today:

> 'Ill fares the land, to hast'ning ills
> a prey,
> Where wealth accumulates and
> men decay.'

We have a growth that impoverishes rather than enriches. The dominance of the business perspective and an addiction to the 'bottom line' as the defining goal of human society have twisted the concept of community and perverted the notion of the public good. Thus in our modern economy the central purpose of life is shopping; the purpose of the family is to raise compliant future workers and consumers; the purpose of schools to teach marketable job skills; the purpose of government to boost business; and the purpose of Third World nations to provide cheap labour, raw materials and new markets.



MARK EDWARDS / STILL PICTURES

Hidden costs: a helicopter drops lime into a dying Swedish lake to neutralize the effects of acid rain.

Instead of an economy in service of community we have the reverse. In the original Greek, economics (*oikonomia*) means 'good housekeeping' and it is that broader humanitarian vision that has vanished. 'True economics,' writes Herman Daly, 'studies the community as a whole and locates market activity within it' in a quest for 'the long-term welfare of the whole community'.

Nor is our modern economy capable any longer of providing jobs and improving living standards for the majority. The evidence – and it's there for any who care to look – is unequivocal. The gap between rich and poor is widening in nation after nation. Real wages are declining as employment growth sputters. There are now more than 30 million unemployed in the West with no sign of the oft-promised outpouring of new jobs. Mainstream economists say this wrenching transformation to the new information age (what some have labelled the 'creative destruction' of the marketplace) will be worth it in the end. Don't count on it.

The truth is corporations are in the business of cutting jobs, not creating them. Witness the recent announcement by telecommunications giant AT&T that it would cut 40,000 jobs over the next three years. (The company's stock on the New York Exchange immediately rose $2.62 a share.) Or data that shows the top 500 companies in the US cut their workforces by 4.4 million between 1980 and 1993; this at a time when corporate assets more than doubled and the salaries of corporate executives increased more than six-fold. [6]

In the Third World, employment in the modern sector continues to grow in a few isolated enclaves. Chinese and Indonesian factories churn out an unending stream of Nike running shoes and Barbie dolls from non-unionized workers, often women, working 50-hour weeks for a few dollars a day. In Mexico – the lab test for economic globalization – it's been all downhill since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed three years ago. Over two million Mexicans lost their jobs after the 1994 peso devaluation and another two million peasants have been forced off their land since NAFTA.

Meanwhile, urban slums in the Third World proliferate, the total number of poor grows and overall living standards plummet. According to the World Health Organization a fifth of the world's nearly six billion people live in extreme poverty, almost a third of all children are undernourished and half the planet's population lacks access to basic essential drugs.

The global economy is not a total balls-up of course. It is working perfectly fine for some people. Like the world's 358 billionaires whose combined wealth now exceeds that of the world's poorest 2.5 billion people. And *Forbes* magazine tells us the number of non-Japanese, Asian multi-millionaires will double to 800,000 this year. The same article neglects to mention that 675 million Asians will continue to live in absolute poverty.

Orthodox economics and its seers have a lot to answer for in all this. As Canadian social critic John Ralston Saul notes: 'If economists were doctors, they would be mired in malpractice suits.' [7] He's right of course. The advice of economists has been treated as gospel when it should have been dismissed as self-serving cant.

And today's standard free-market prescription for economic health – deregulated markets, lower taxes for the wealthy, privatization and government cutbacks – is simply more of the same. It's a bit like re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Instead of this stale dogma we need a new vision of economics which puts people back at the centre of the human economy and subsumes economics to the interests of the public good.

I don't want to be naive about this; it's not going to be a stroll in the park. Those profiting from the current set-up will not cede power voluntarily. Thankfully, there are hundreds of organizations and millions of people around the planet who share my deep sense of unease about the direction in which we're heading. And many of them are working hard to sow seeds of change, to develop a practical, realistic strategy for forging a new economy. You'll read about some of their efforts in the following pages.

There's even a new discipline called 'ecological economics' which is attempting to challenge mainstream growth-centred economics from within academia. Though you may not have got wind of it yet, there is a movement brewing – a movement which is attempting to turn conventional economics on its head by redirecting its focus from the narrow concerns of growth and efficiency to the broader concerns of community solidarity, democratic governance and environmental sustainability. The movement doesn't have a name or a leader or a headquarters. But it does have momentum. And more importantly it has a vision of a new green economy. ■

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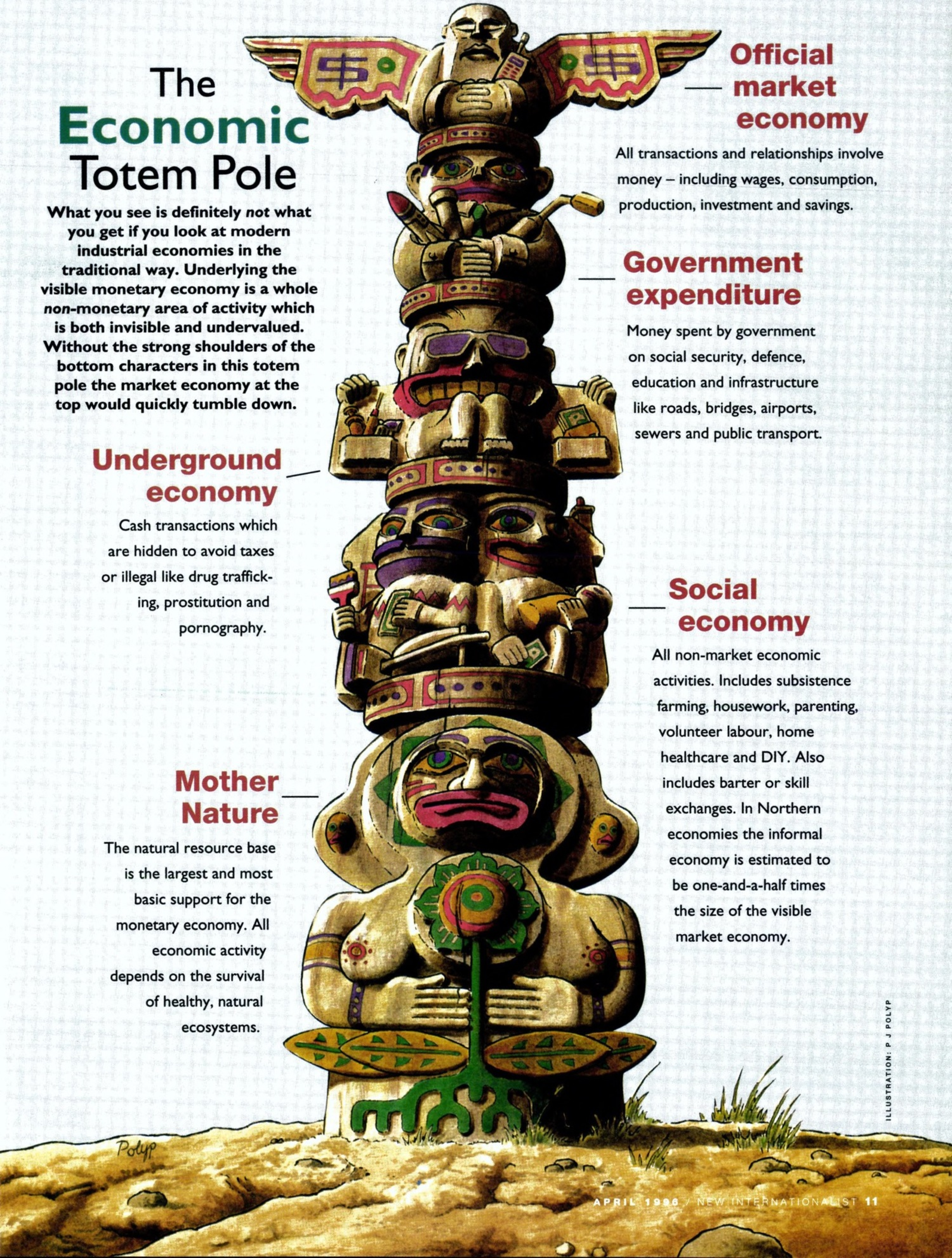
[1] *The Ecology of Commerce*, Paul Hawken, HarperCollins, New York, NY, 1993.
[2] *When Corporations Rule the World*, David C Korten, Kumarian Press, West Hartford, CT, 1995.
[3] *Alternatives Magazine*, Vol 21, No 4, Oct/Nov 1995, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON.
[4] *For the Common Good*, Herman E Daly and John B Cobb Jr, Beacon Press, Boston, MA, 1989.
[5] 'Ecological Footprints and Appropriated Carrying Capacity', William Rees and Mathis Wackernagel, from *Investing in Natural Capital*, Eds. Jansson, Hammer, Folke and Costanza, Island Press, Washington, DC, 1994.
[6] From 'An agenda to tame corporations, reclaim citizen sovereignty and restore economic sanity', a speech by David Korten of the People Centred Development Forum, 3 Sept 1995.
[7] *The Unconscious Civilization*, John Ralston Saul, Anansi Press, Concord, ON, 1995.

# The Economic Totem Pole

**What you see is definitely *not* what you get if you look at modern industrial economies in the traditional way. Underlying the visible monetary economy is a whole *non*-monetary area of activity which is both invisible and undervalued. Without the strong shoulders of the bottom characters in this totem pole the market economy at the top would quickly tumble down.**



## Official market economy

All transactions and relationships involve money – including wages, consumption, production, investment and savings.

## Government expenditure

Money spent by government on social security, defence, education and infrastructure like roads, bridges, airports, sewers and public transport.

## Underground economy

Cash transactions which are hidden to avoid taxes or illegal like drug trafficking, prostitution and pornography.

## Social economy

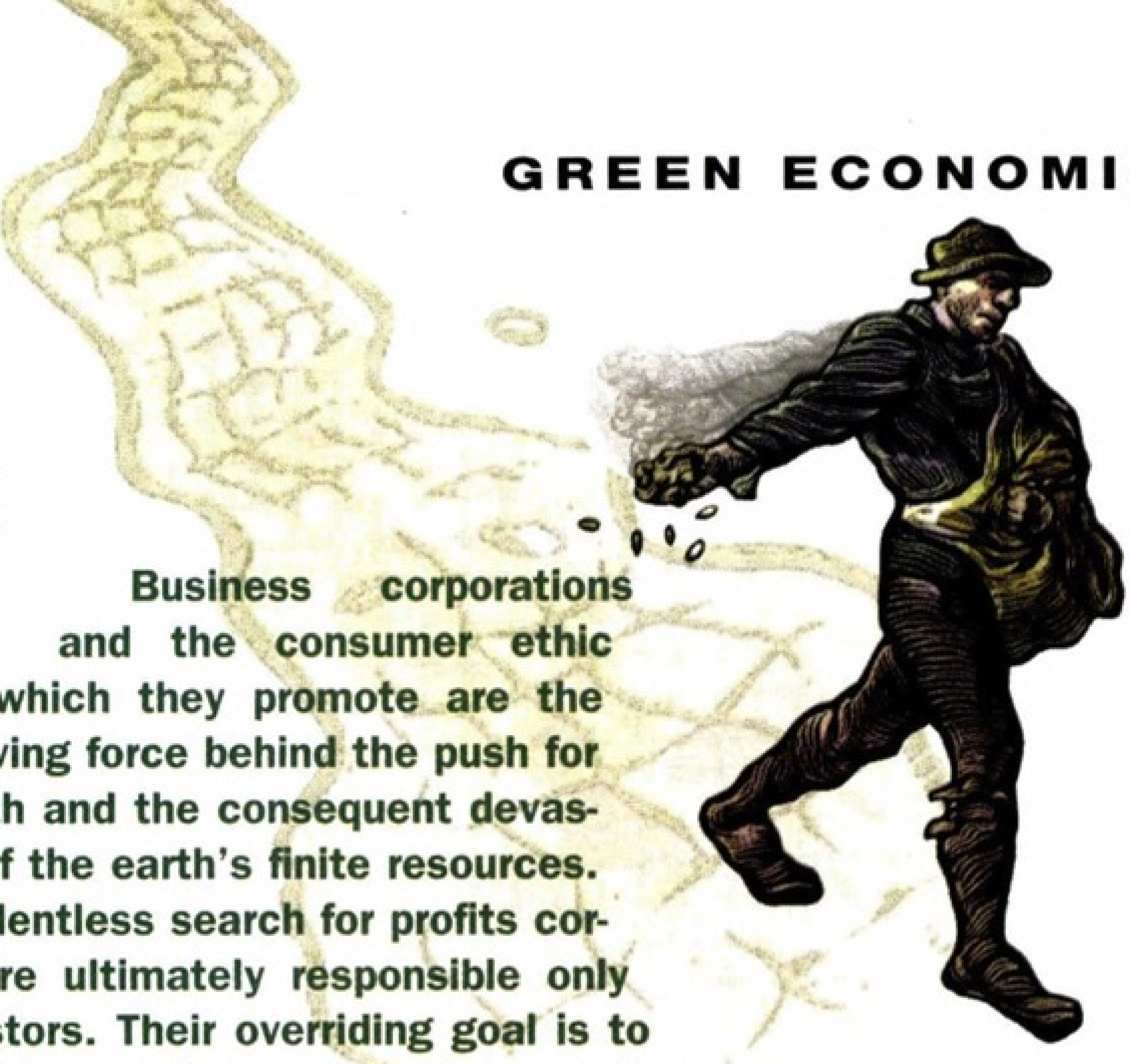
All non-market economic activities. Includes subsistence farming, housework, parenting, volunteer labour, home healthcare and DIY. Also includes barter or skill exchanges. In Northern economies the informal economy is estimated to be one-and-a-half times the size of the visible market economy.

## Mother Nature

The natural resource base is the largest and most basic support for the monetary economy. All economic activity depends on the survival of healthy, natural ecosystems.

ILLUSTRATION: P J POLYP

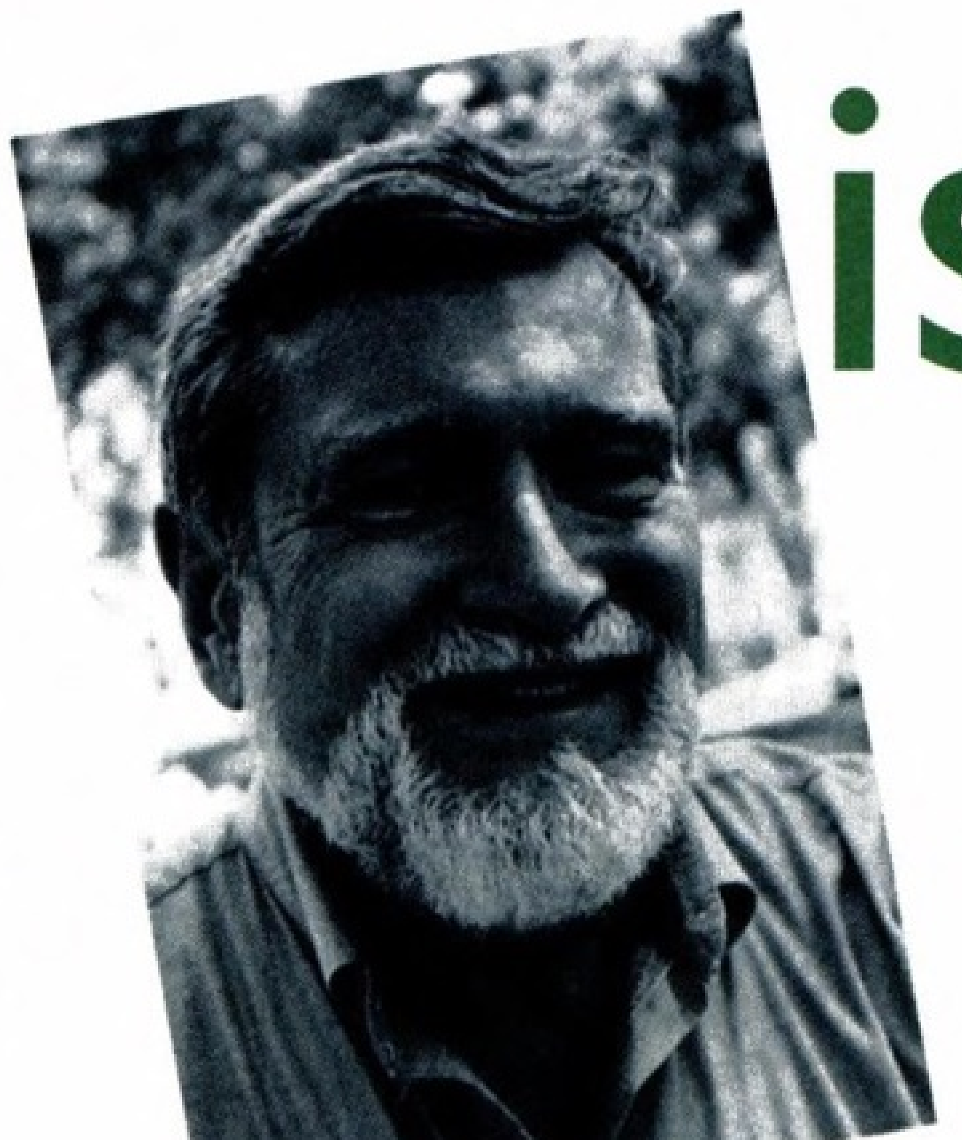
# Control corporations



**Business corporations and the consumer ethic which they promote are the driving force behind the push for growth and the consequent devastation of the earth's finite resources. In their relentless search for profits corporations are ultimately responsible only to their investors. Their overriding goal is to maximize short-term returns. And since capital is rarely rooted locally, investment decisions are detached from their consequences. The rights and freedoms of corporations now take precedence over the democratic rights of peoples and nations – and of the earth itself. So a key step towards a green economy involves gaining control over private corporations.**

## 'Develo

## is a



Corporate critic David Korten: 'Green growth is an oxymoron.'

**With a doctorate in business administration from Stanford University and a comfortable middle-class family background David Korten is not your usual critic of big business. He taught at both the Harvard Graduate Business School and the School of Public Health before working for the Ford Foundation and the US Agency for International Development in Asia for 20 years. In 1992 he returned to New York City and set up the People-Centred Development Forum, a global citizens network dedicated to the creation of just, inclusive and sustainable societies. Since then he has become a major critic of corporate power and what he calls the 'all-consuming, increasingly self-destructive obsession with the pursuit of money'. Wayne Ellwood spoke to him in his New York office.**

**David, you've spent a lot of time working in the Third World, especially in Asia. How did that experience influence the way you look at standard notions of 'development' and 'progress'?**

Being overseas really forced me to be much more conscious of basic questions. The assumption was not that a country had already arrived economically, but that we were trying to 'develop' it to some point. That raised questions about what we mean by development and whether progress was really being made on things that matter It took me a long time before I realized that development is really a sham.

In the Philippines, where I was for ten years, 60 per cent of the population lives in absolute poverty while glitzy shopping malls for the wealthy abound. Those gross inequities and the same basic dynamic are repeated everywhere.

**After you became disillusioned with official development agencies you started working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). What kind of creative alternatives have you found there?**

My experiences left me convinced that real development depends on people's ability to gain control of and use effectively the real resources of their communities (land, water, labour, technology and human ingenuity and motivation) to meet their own needs. The more economic power becomes highly-concentrated and detached from any local interest, the more likely it is to be used to benefit the global power holders at the expense of larger community interests. Local resources are more likely to be used to serve the needs of people when markets and the ownership of capital are local.

NGOs can have an important role in building local economies and in advocacy for policies that strengthen local control. But not all NGOs are created equal. There's a big difference between those that are part of the system and whose very existence is premised on charity and those civil-society organizations that are working for real change. If you look at the whole aid system you see it is an instrument for advancing the corporate agenda by making people more dependent on the global economy, by shifting their production away from local needs to producing for export and by shifting control of their resource base from local people to foreign corporations.

**Corporations are the main proponents of the orthodoxy of economic growth. They say the solution to poverty is to stimulate growth and create more wealth for everyone.**

There is little evidence that economic growth alleviates poverty. Since 1950 the world's total economic output has increased five-fold while the number of people living in absolute deprivation has doubled. That growth has pushed human demands on the ecosystem beyond what the planet is capable of sustaining. And that does two things: it accelerates the rate of breakdown of the planet's ability to regenerate its natural systems. And it intensifies the competition between rich and poor for the resources that remain. I now believe that what GNP really measures is the rate at which the economically powerful are expropriating the resources of the economically weak in order to convert them into products that quickly become the garbage of the rich.

**Corporate spokespeople and their government supporters claim that free trade and open markets are the only way to have an efficient market system. The approach seems to be that 'business knows best'.**

The modern corporation is specifically designed to concentrate economic power and to protect the people who use that power from liability for the consequences of its uses. Free-trade agreements like NAFTA and GATT are not really trade agreements at all. They are economic integration agreements intended to guarantee the rights of global corporations to move both goods and investments wherever they wish – free from public interference or accountability. Corporate power really lies in this ability to manipulate communities and markets in their own interest.

As corporations replace workers with technology they gain even more clout. Local governments are now forced not only to give large corporations tax breaks but to

# pment sham'

subsidize directly their operations as well. This is what global competition is really about – communities and workers competing against one another to absorb ever more of the production costs of the world's most powerful and profitable companies.

### Is sustainable growth possible?

In my view 'green growth' is really an oxymoron. In a deregulated market economy global corporations are accountable to only one master, a rogue financial system with one incessant demand – keep your stock price as high as possible by maximizing short-term returns. One way to do that is to shift as much of the cost of the corporation's operations as possible onto the community. The goal is to externalize costs and privatize gain.

A green corporation simply can't last in our unregulated market where competing companies are not internalizing their costs. If you do attempt to 'green' your business you'll soon be bought out by some corporate raiders who see an opportunity to externalize the costs and make a short-term killing.

### Do you see any means of putting people back at the centre of economic activity?

It's fundamental to democracy and to a market economy that neither works effectively or fairly unless you have significant equality in economic power. And that comes from having a stake in ownership. The foundation of any alternative economy has to be based on worker-owned enterprises, co-operatives, small local businesses and so forth.

We need to break up large concentrations of economic power, re-establish the connection between investment returns and productive activity and root the ownership of capital in people and communities engaged primarily in local production to meet local needs. We need a vision of a global system of localized economies that reduce the scale of economic activity and link economic decisions to their consequences.

### Can you give me some concrete steps you would take.

Well, for one thing we need to reject any trade agreement that's written by industry. We need a very different set of principles in our international agreements: one that honours and protects the rights of local people to decide who they want to trade with and on what terms, rather than protecting the rights of corporations to do whatever they want, irrespective of the wishes of local people. We also need fiscal measures to help achieve a redistribution of wealth through progressive taxation – like very high rates of taxation on very short-term capital gains.

If an investor has made gains over a period of five to ten years then they've likely been engaged in some kind of productive activity and there may be an argument to give a tax advantage as an incentive. But gains made in the short term, from a few seconds to a few months, are not a productive contribution. They're pure extraction and they should be taxed away and the funds put to some public use.

### If you look around the world there seems to be little challenge to the current economic model.

That is true at the level of governments. Politicians and the corporations and financial institutions to which they are beholden are unlikely to provide leadership towards needed reform. Instead, we need to look to civil society and grassroots political movements. The system may seem impregnable but I am constantly amazed at the extent to which ordinary people respond to critiques of the way it is functioning.

There is an implicit understanding that we have pushed the earth's social and environmental systems beyond their limits of tolerance so that a small minority of the world's people can consume far more than their rightful share of the world's wealth. The industrial era (and modern corporations have been the cornerstone of that era) is exhausting the human and natural resource base on which our lives depend. It's still hard for us to imagine alternatives yet our situation is one in which we have no choice but to realize that we're not going to correct the system by minor tinkering at the margins. It calls for very fundamental and radical changes. ■

**David Korten** is the author of *When Corporations Rule the World* (Kumarian Press, 1995) and the founder of the People-Centred Development Forum, 14 E 17th St., Ste 5, New York, NY 10003 Tel: 212 620-7137, Fax: 212 242-1901.

Father and daughter in a Manila shantytown. Sixty per cent of Filipinos live in absolute poverty.

MIKE GOLDWATER / NETWORK

ES APE

# Culture jamming

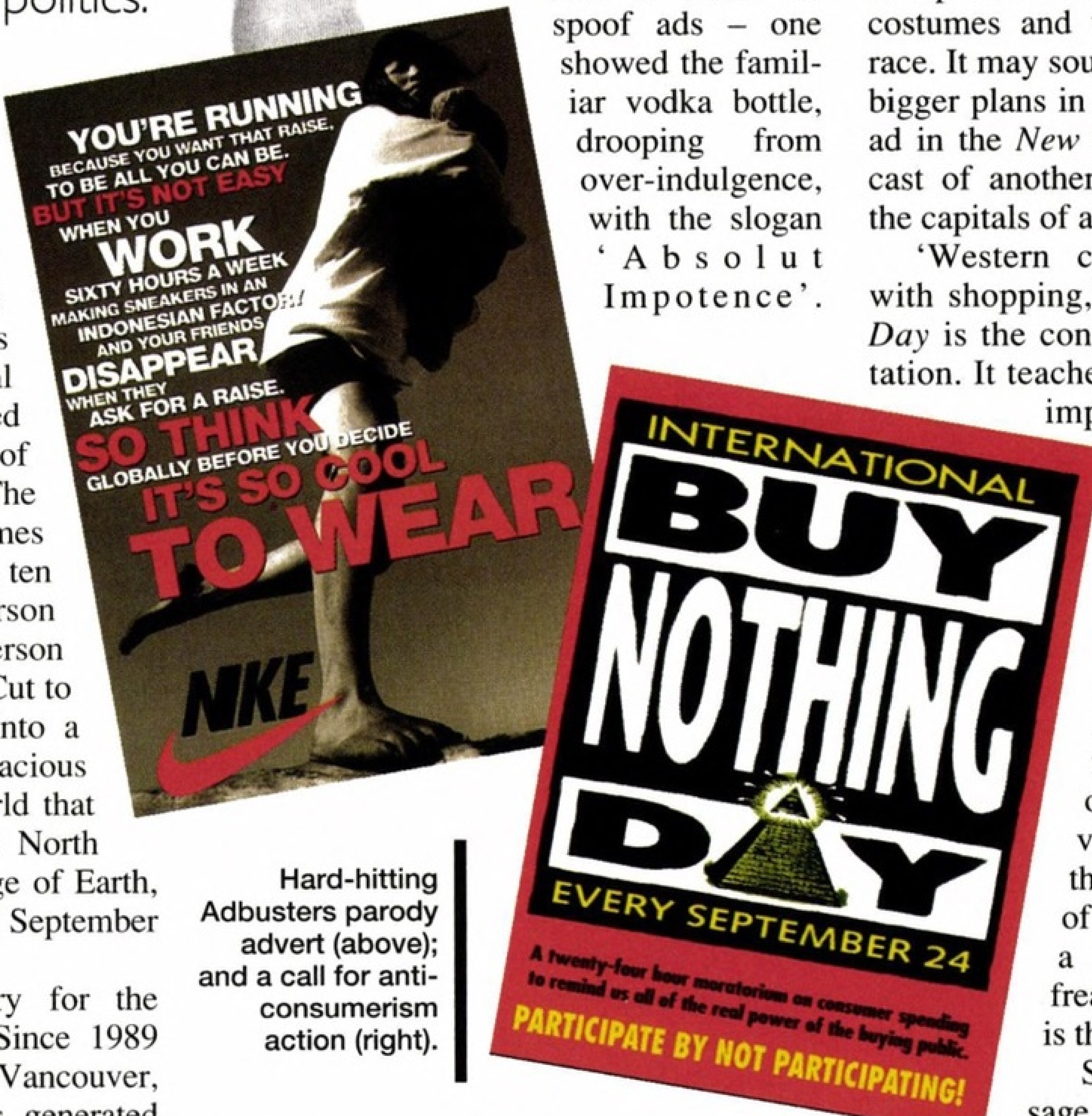
**Ross Crockford** visits Adbusters, a Vancouver-based campaigning group that combines parody with politics.

The viewers of CNN Headline News were in for a bit of a shock. One afternoon last September, amid the channel's standard fare of news bites and ads for cars and mutual funds, this appeared : an animated pig, smacking its lips, rising out of a map of North America. 'The average North American consumes five times more than a Mexican, ten times more than a Chinese person and thirty times more than a person from India,' said an announcer. Cut to a bulldozer, plowing garbage into a landfill. 'We are the most voracious consumers in the world – a world that could die because of how we North Americans live.' Cut to an image of Earth, receding in space. 'Give it a rest. September 24th is *Buy Nothing Day*.'

Score another small victory for the Adbusters Media Foundation. Since 1989 this group of activists based in Vancouver, on Canada's Pacific coast, has generated dozens of similarly cheeky and provocative messages. And fought to get them onto television screens. As they see it, most TV ads are propaganda for an unsustainable way of life and our media is more interested in selling that way of life than in discussing ways we can change it. Adbusters tries to beat the big advertisers at their own game – by promoting ideas instead of products.

'We're trying to develop a new language of protest,' says Kalle Lasn, one of the group's founders. 'Corporations are defining our culture for us. It's time for us to take it back.' With that goal in mind the Estonian-born Lasn, 53, publishes *Adbusters* magazine, a quarterly 'journal of the mental environment' exposing advertising practices and offering oddball 'culture jamming' strategies. (One recent issue contained a counterfeit coupon for a free hamburger and invited readers to persuade McDonald's employees to accept it.)

Between the articles are ad parodies. And even these have created a stir. The makers of Absolut Vodka once threatened to sue *Adbusters* over a series of spoof ads – one showed the familiar vodka bottle, drooping from over-indulgence, with the slogan 'Absolut Impotence'. But they eventually backed off, realizing that a lawsuit would only give the magazine more publicity.



Hard-hitting Adbusters parody advert (above); and a call for anti-consumerism action (right).

Lasn also makes 30-second, broadcast-quality 'subvertisements' like the *Buy Nothing Day* message but he has trouble convincing TV stations to run them. Last year he sent a dozen of the 'uncommercials' he's produced (blasting such things as television addiction and industrial forestry) to the three biggest stations in New York City. Though the messages were professionally slick and their claims backed by statistics all three stations turned him down.

'Television is the most powerful medium of our time but the average citizen does not have access to it,' claims Lasn. 'This pandering to the commercial interest has gone so far that our basic freedom of speech is being violated.'

The powers that be will find it more difficult to stop the message of *Buy Nothing Day*. Last September 24, *Buy Nothing Day* went international. In Manchester, England, a group called Enough celebrated the date by launching a fake new soft drink called Happiness™. In the Netherlands activists occupied a shopping mall dressed in rat costumes and urged people to leave the race. It may sound loony but Lasn has even bigger plans in 1996, including a full-page ad in the *New York Times* and the broadcast of another animated pig message in the capitals of all of the G-7 countries.

'Western culture has gone berzerk with shopping,' says Lasn. '*Buy Nothing Day* is the consumer equivalent of meditation. It teaches you something about the impulse to buy that has been so carefully conditioned into us by advertizing.'

Breaking the consumer habit won't be easy. At the end of last year's *Buy Nothing Day* spot on CNN a toll-free telephone number appeared on-screen and dozens of viewers called to express their opinions. Three-quarters of them were hostile. 'You're a bunch of tree-hugging freaks,' said one. 'Advertizing is the American way.'

Says Kalle Lasn: 'Our message goes against the grain of what North Americans have been brought up to believe. But let's face it, neither our consumer culture nor our economic system are sustainable. We're at the beginning of a revolution which is fuelled by a quest for sustainability – a quest to give our children and our children's children the same kinds of opportunities that we have. It requires incredibly hard choices. Now is the time to make them.' ■

**For more information contact:**
**The Media Foundation, 1243 West 7th Avenue, Vancouver BC, Canada V6H 1B7. Tel: 604 736 9401, Fax: 604 737 6021**
**E-mail: adbusters@adbusters.org**
**Enough Anticonsumerism Campaign, World Centre, 6 Mount St., Manchester, Britain M2 5NS.**
**Tel: 0161 237-1630, Fax: 0161 228 2347.**

from
Calvin Klein

An Adbuster's Ad Parody

Fight for economic justice

**In the current global economy gaps between rich and poor are increasing both within and between nations. The core problem is the concentrated accumulation and control of capital in an ever decreasing number of hands. This process is now accelerating as capital escapes national controls. A green economy would recognize the link between consumption, poverty and equity and would reduce the poverty gap by breaking the cycle of capital concentration. It would encourage Third World self-reliance by working to reform dramatically or shut down the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).**

# Removing the noose

The shopworn solutions of international finance need democratic alternatives. **Susan Meeker-Lowry** looks at one such effort in Guyana.

IT'S pay day for government workers in Guyana – a day people once looked forward to. But these days the money doesn't go far. 'Only God knows how we make two ends meet,' one office worker groaned. 'Today I can buy a chicken. After that it is pure starvation for me and my children.' It is hard times like these that have turned people in this tiny South American country into leaders in the struggle against IMF and World Bank structural adjustment policies. The Guyanese are coming together in support of a unique, country-wide program aimed at fostering the long-term well-being of all the country's citizens, rather than responding to the short-term demands of the international market.

Guyana is one of the most heavily indebted countries in the world and one of the poorest in the Western hemisphere. The irony is that the money-poor nation is rich in natural resources (bauxite, gold and diamonds) and has some of the most extensive tropical rainforests in the world. In the late 1980s under World Bank supervision the government of Desmond Hoyte implemented an 'Economic Recovery Program' which removed the last barriers to foreign control over key sectors of the economy, benefiting outside investors and multinational corporations almost exclusively. Today, three-quarters of Guyana's forests have been leased by foreign corporations – many of them Asian-based firms already responsible for pillaging rainforests in their own part of the world. Under the terms of a recent IMF agreement Guyana now offers multinationals a ten-year exemption from all taxes. (Last August this policy backfired dramatically when Omai Gold Mining Ltd – run by Canadian-based Cambior Inc and US-based Golden Star Resources – was responsible for one of the world's worst cyanide spills. Four billion litres of cyanide-laced effluent spilled into the Essequibo River after a waste-holding pond broke. Guyana is still dealing with the environmental devastation caused by the spill.)

Since the late 1980s, nearly 80 per cent of revenues and 60 per cent of export earnings have gone to service and repay foreign debt while malnutrition, infant mortality, disease, unemployment and poverty have all soared.

The tide turned when voters elected Cheddi Jagan of the People's Progressive Party in the first free elections in 30 years. Ironically, Jagan, a Marxist, was Guyana's first native-born Prime Minister when in 1953 British leader Winston Churchill ordered his Government dissolved. In 1961 Jagan's overtures to US President John Kennedy were rebuffed and a covert CIA operation was mounted to drive Jagan from power. Though keen to introduce much-needed social and economic reforms when he was elected in 1992 Jagan found himself handcuffed by the strict conditions of the IMF deal.

And that's when the Bretton Woods
rm Organization (BWRO) came along.
RO was launched in 1991 by Davison
oo, a former senior economist with
MF where he had been responsible for
ning and implementing structural
tment programs (SAPs) for Africa,
America and the Caribbean. Budhoo
ned from the IMF in disgust, hoping,
id, to 'wash my hands of the blood of
ons of poor and starving people'.

stead Budhoo sought to create the
's first concrete alternative to SAPs –
Alternative Structural Adjustment
ram or ASAP. Budhoo calls the ASAP
ept 'a people's economic program with
y'. The idea is to combine direct grass-
involvement with the technical skills of governmental officials and other interest groups. 'The IMF/World Bank system is dead,' Budhoo says bluntly. 'What we are

Sch
appr

JAMES HENDERSON / HUTCHISON LIBRARY

GUYANA
Georgetown
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trying to do is manage the transition' – to design democratically an economic policy whose main goal is to meet the basic needs of the entire population.

In May 1994, Jagan agreed to a resolution proposing 'extensive government co-operation with BWRO and the people of Guyana in designing an ASAP'. The first step was to appoint a National Committee to carry out countrywide consultations. So far several seminars have been held bringing together unions, small businesses, women's groups, consumer organizations, manufacturers, teachers, Amerindians and environmental groups.

According to Eileen Cox, BWRO's Vice Chair in Guyana, the proposed ASAP includes recommendations for a People's Assembly as well as a national 'liveable' minimum wage and an International Debt Tribunal 'to remove the noose from around our children's necks'. BWRO would also like to see a Privatization Commission 'to protect Guyana from the undue influence of multinational companies' and a new public utilities act to enable the Public Utilities Commission 'to uphold the public interest'. Says Eileen Cox: 'We cannot let our democracy be hijacked by two agencies in Washington. It is time for us to reclaim our economic destiny.'

The specifics of an ASAP would vary from country to country, but Budhoo stresses the need to focus on food security, as well as small-scale, labor-intensive, high value-added enterprises. BRWO also underlines the need to improve rural infrastructure (including roads, communications, affordable energy and technology) and the need for 'friendly' credit – local banks which make small loans to poor people, particularly women, at no or low interest rates, using a peer group lending process. Exporting primary resources and commodities like grains and minerals is firmly rejected.

Several other SAPped countries have also begun working with Budhoo's Bretton Woods Reform group to create their own ASAPs, most recently Grenada. And the BWRO has also been invited to Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Mozambique, India, the Philippines, Trinidad and Haiti.

Elsewhere activists are also working to create national alternative economic platforms. In El Salvador, the National Development Foundation (FUNDE), a Salvadorean research institute with ties to popular organizations, started work on an alternative development program for El Salvador in 1994. And in Papua New Guinea, a coalition of 35 organizations including trade unions, church groups, student, women's and other community groups, has called for the renegotiation of their structural adjustment program and BWRO has been asked to help.

On another front, during the autumn of 1995, almost half a million Mexicans cast their ballots in favour of a 'Liberty Referendum'. The vote was organized by a coalition of non-governmental organizations and sponsored by the Mexican Action Network on Free Trade (an alliance of labor, farmer, environment and social organizations) as well as groups representing small and medium businesses, coffee growers and peasants.

The Referendum was a stinging indictment of economic globalization. It called for reorienting public spending to create jobs and meet the needs of the Mexican people; adopting a new monetary policy that promotes production without excessive inflation; lowering interest rates; suspending privatization of state-owned businesses; redirecting agricultural policy to local markets and renegotiating both the foreign debt and the North American Free Trade Agreement. According to Referendum spokesman Alejandro Nadal Egea the vote was an attempt by civil society 'to recover the right and the capability to make strategic decisions in economic policy'.

There are many who argue that the kinds of grassroots alternatives presented in this article don't have a chance, given the realities of free trade and the global economy, even while agreeing that adjustment policies lead to pain and destruction. But the fact is grassroots alternatives are working every day in every country. There are co-operatives, micro-enterprises and small-scale lending schemes that help get them off the ground. There are sustainable forestry operations, appropriate technology and agricultural programs, projects designed by and for women and workers that are making strides in improving people's lives and healing the environment.

In all corners of the world people are ready for the opportunity to participate in creating equitable, environmentally-sound and politically-liberating alternatives to what is currently offered by the élite and powerful. But that's not all it will take. As Davison Budhoo says: 'We need millions and millions of people to stand up and protest.' ■

'Hey fella, want to change dollars?' Guyana's alternative economic program may not please these blackmarket entrepreneurs.

JAMES HENDERSON / HUTCHISON LIBRARY

**Susan Meeker-Lowry** is a writer, activist and the author of *Economics as if the Earth Really Mattered* (1988) and *Invested in the Common Good* (1995), both published by New Society Publishers. She lives in Montpelier, Vermont where she is initiating a local currency project.

Foster community

# Natural neighbours

**Global economic forces are painting the world a drab and uniform shade of grey. A green economy would aim to re-build and re-value community, recognizing the critical importance of social capital and the basic green principle of local decision-making and local responsibility.**

**Kirkpatrick Sale** asks how we get from here to community.

AT the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the ruling powers of Great Britain embarked on the most sustained effort to destroy community life ever undertaken. From 1770 to 1830 some 3,280 enclosure bills were passed by which more than six million acres of commonly-held lands – open fields, meadows, wetlands, forests – were put into private hands for private gain. So by 1830 not a single county had more than three per cent of its land open to public use.

Villagers who had wrested livings from these common lands for centuries were, in an historical eye-blink, forced from the countryside to the city and its slums, doubling urban populations in just over 40 years.

George Sturt, an historian who knew English village life intimately, has written:

'To the enclosure of the common more than to any other cause may be traced all the changes which have subsequently passed over the village. It was like knocking the keystone out of an arch... When the cottager was cut off from his resources... It was out of the question to obtain most of his supplies by his own handiwork: they had to be procured, ready-made, from some other source.'

That source, I need hardly say, was a shop. And behind that shop, the factory and the market system and a world ruled by capital and profit that found commonality and self-sufficiency and mutual-aid and barter and local economies anathema. Industrialism required consumers, atomized and needy, not stalwart village citizens.

Just as it was the aim of the industrial economy as it began to eviscerate community, so it has been in all the decades since. In fact, it has now pretty well decimated villages and small towns throughout the industrial North, disembowelled the larger cities and established a pattern of suburban sprawl that makes the achievement of anything approximating communitarian life well-nigh impossible. Oh, there's plenty of talk about community: the idea is ever-resilient, probably because it reflects the single most natural form of human society, found in all cultures. It is a word that still retains some magic, some hint of how people are supposed to relate to each other, some suggestion of a world in which friendship and co-operation had some meaning.

But it is mostly talk. The actual thing, a few hundred people who live and work together, each known to the other, each in some measure dependent on the other, is scarce indeed in industrial society. *Because of industrial society.* This is important to understand right from the start. But the empowered community is in fact essential for any kind of green economy that values human responsibility, ecological harmony, democratic decision-making, economic self-reliance, fair distribution and the careful, sensitive use of the land and its resources.

MARK LUDAC / IMPACT VISUALS

Resisting the monoculture: a Pennsylvania Amish couple load groceries into their horse-drawn carriage.

However daunting such a prospect might seem there are models of several sorts, even in the heart of the modern world, that can serve as guides for ways to a community-based economy. In the US, the ones that come first to mind are several farm communities that make up the Old Order Amish, largely in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana. Based fixedly in religion, these communities have been able in significant ways to resist the industrial monoculture and keep some measure of the sodality, harmony and simplicity of the communitarian life. By having each farm self-sufficient in important respects and by refusing to accept many of the technologies of modernity, these communities remain largely free of the ebb and flow of the surrounding economy. It is exactly the insularity of these places, their deliberate distance from what the Amish tend to call 'the other world' that gives them their coherence.

Another model lies in attempts that have been made in the last few decades to establish communities of like-minded people opting to live together. These 'intentional communities' range from a few dozen people pooling resources and setting up a communal business to small villages where some services are communal but people work off-site; or land trusts where homes are individually owned and only the land is held in common.

None of these has yet achieved economic self-sufficiency or developed a textured communitarian culture. But the ways in which some intentional communities strive to work, produce and share co-operatively – and are conscious of their responsibility to the health of the land – are among the virtues any green community would emulate.

The difficulties that have beset intentional communities over the years, particularly those that consciously have tried to live within their bioregional resources and with a measure of economic independence, suggest just how arduous and chancy it is to go against the dominant economy. Particularly so when you begin with people only roughly united in a shared vision and without the centuries-old traditions of communal life.

That is what makes the establishment of green communities within a local economy so formidable a task. I am not arguing that it cannot be done. Because it must be done (and soon) if the industrial economy is not to choke off all human society and most of surface life along with it.

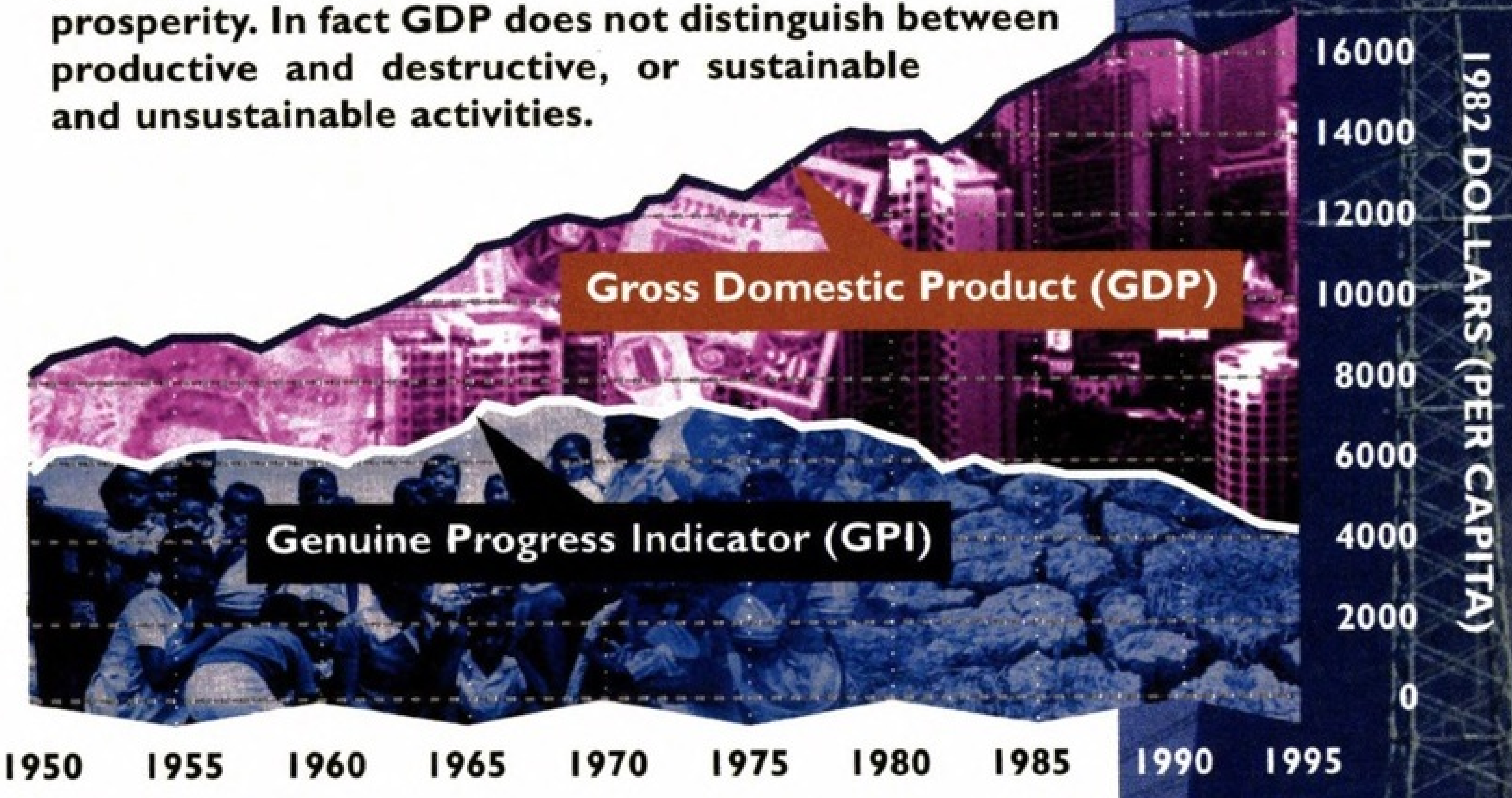
I am only warning that we must begin with the understanding that industrial culture is dead-set against it – and has been from the start. ■

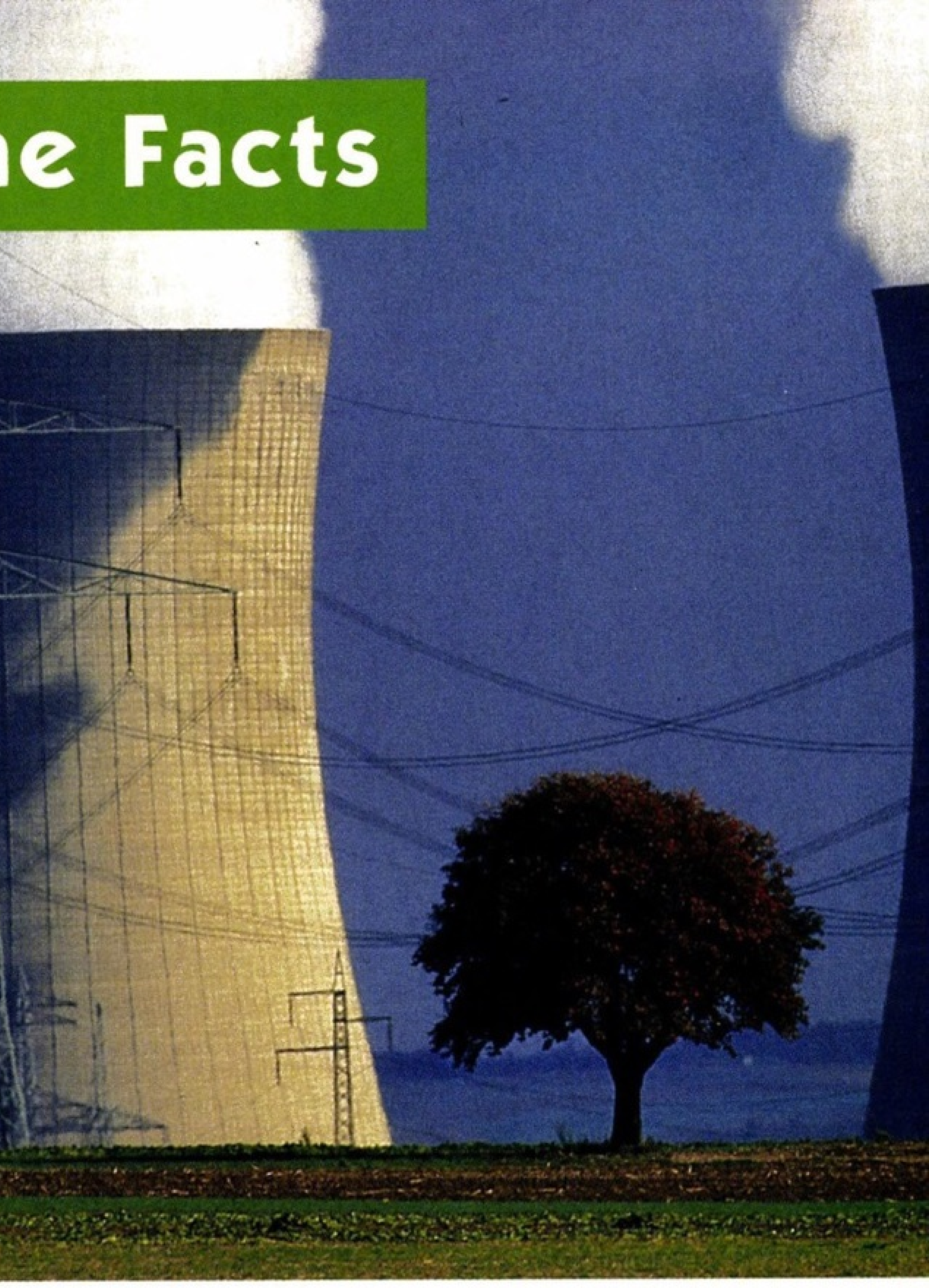
**Kirkpatrick Sale's** latest book is *Rebels Against the Future*. He has written widely on bioregionalism and is a regular contributor to the **NI**.

# Green Economics – The Facts

## Wealth and welfare

**Growth, and especially Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is supposed to reflect relative economic prosperity. In fact GDP does not distinguish between productive and destructive, or sustainable and unsustainable activities.**





◆ A new Genuine Progess Indicator (GPI) which takes into account the social and enivronmental costs of economic activity shows that individual welfare in the US peaked in the early 1970s and has fallen steadily since. A similar gauge of real human welfare is also being developed in Austria, Britain and Germany.[1]

### Hollow numbers

GDP is a faulty measure of a nation's economic health because it ignores:

◆ **Ecological costs**

The destruction of an ancient rainforest would be considered a positive boost to the economy based on the market value of the lumber. Habitat destruction, loss of species, recreational use and aesthetic value would not enter into the equation. The key problem is that GDP treats the depletion of natural capital only as income, rather than depreciation of an income-generating asset.

◆ **Social costs**

All non-monetary activities, including the nurturing and supportive activities of women, are ignored and thus devalued. At the same time the costs of social breakdown – crime prevention, divorce lawyers, psychological counselling – actually adds to GDP.

### Deductions from income

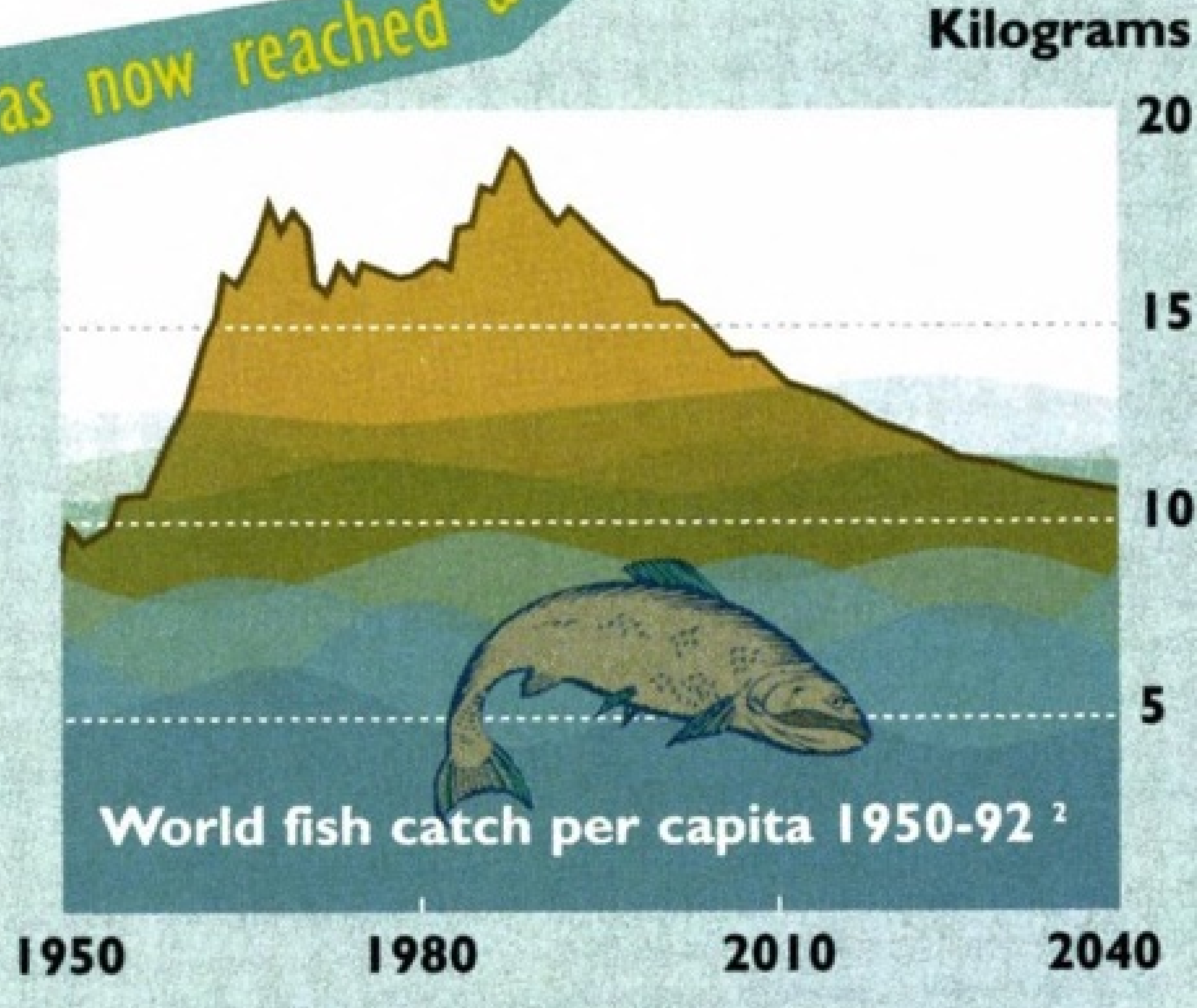
The Genuine Progress Indicator subtracts from income the negative effects of growth:

◆ The costs of commuting; urbanization; auto accidents; water pollution; air pollution; noise pollution

◆ The loss of wetlands and farmland

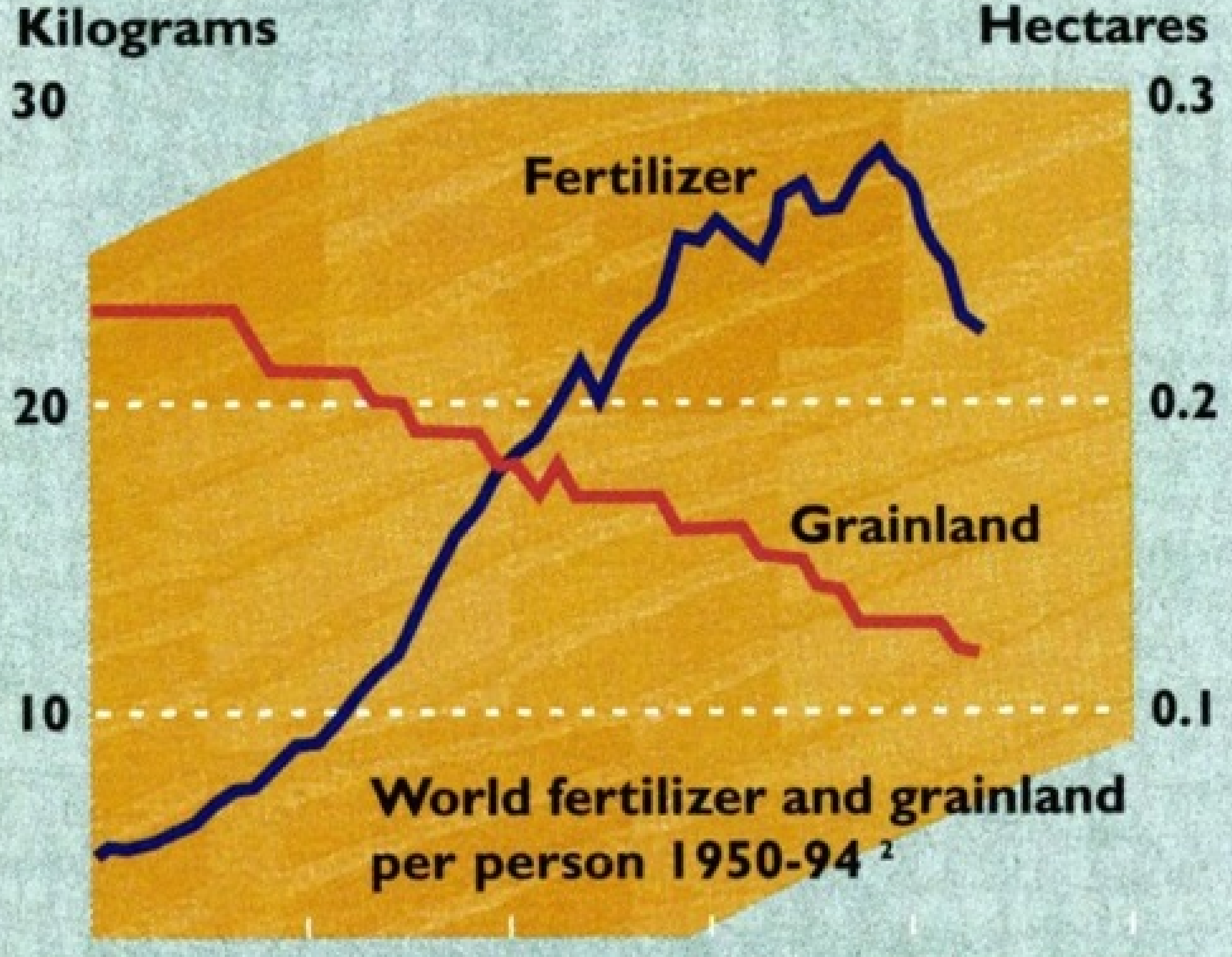
◆ The depletion of non-renewable resources and long-term environmental damage.

The impact of increasing economic growth and massive overconsumption by the wealthy has now reached a critical mass threatening



World fish catch per capita 1950-92 [2]

## Costs of growth



World fertilizer and grainland per person 1950-94 [2]

### Grain drain

As population has increased, global food production has kept pace, increasing both yields and volume through a combination of increased fertilizer use, expanded irrigation and turning more forests and grasslands into croplands.

◆ From 1950-85 per capita grain output rose by 40% as fertilizer use ballooned ten times. Since then fertilizer use has declined steadily as older agricultural lands reached maximum yields and the addition of new foodland also fell.

◆ The average growth in the world grain harvest dropped from 30 million tons a year from 1950-84 to 12 million tons a year from 1984-92. Even if farmers can maintain this yearly increase, per capita grain supplies will fall from 346 kg in 1984 to 248 kg in 2030.[2]

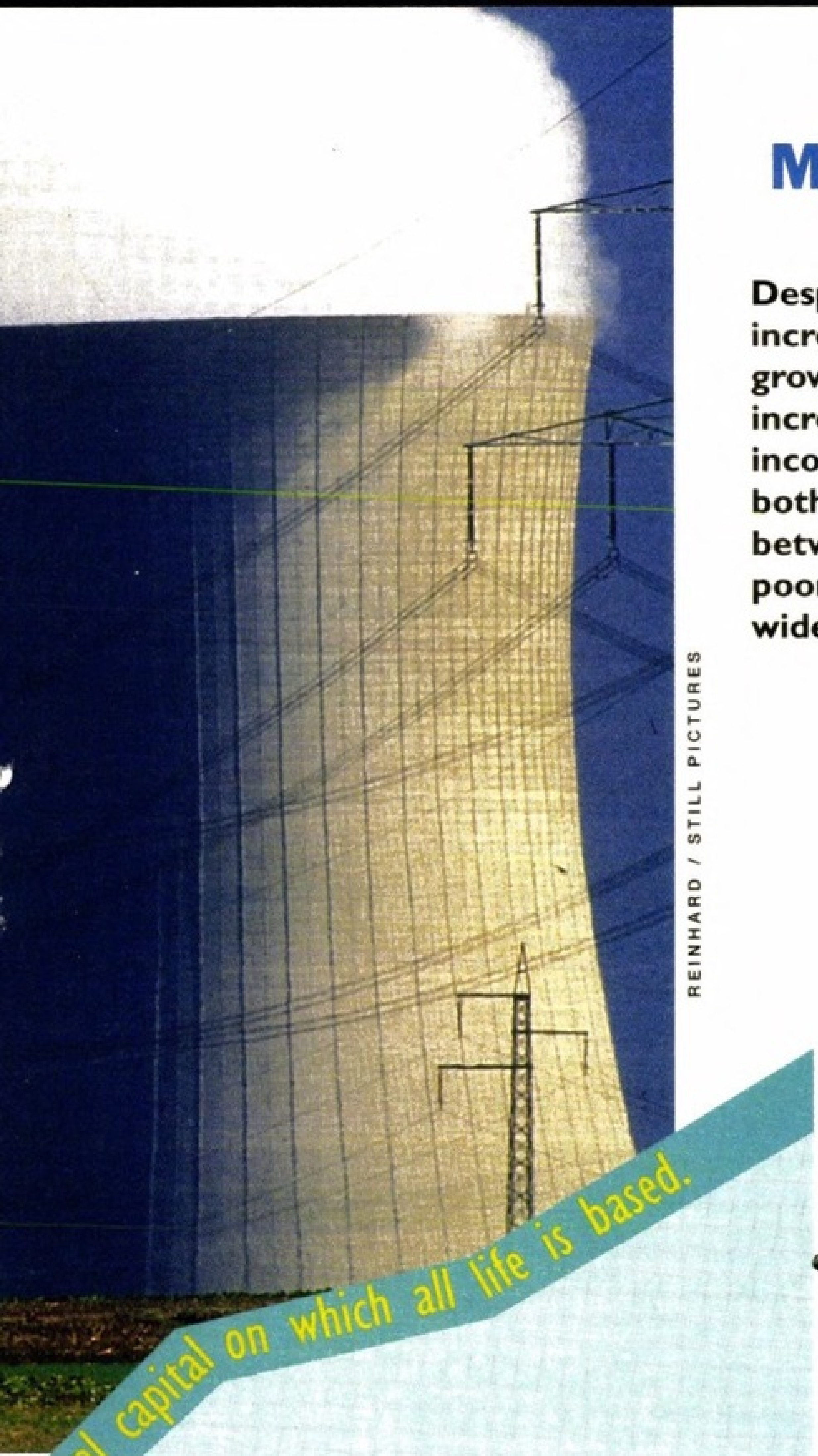
### Fewer fish

◆ From 1950-89 the world fish harvest rose from 22 to 100 million tons, increasing the per capit supply from 9 kg to 19 kg. Now catches are fallin and the UN Food and Agricultural Organizatio warns that all 17 of the world's major fisheries have reached or exceeded sustainable limits and 9 are i serious decline.[3]

### Water worries

Groundwater is being drained to feed irrigate crops and for domestic and industrial use.

◆ Irrigated land accounts for 16% of total farmlan but more than a third of the total harvest. The amount of irrigated land per person peaked in 197 and has been falling ever since.



REINHARD / STILL PICTURES

natural capital on which all life is based.

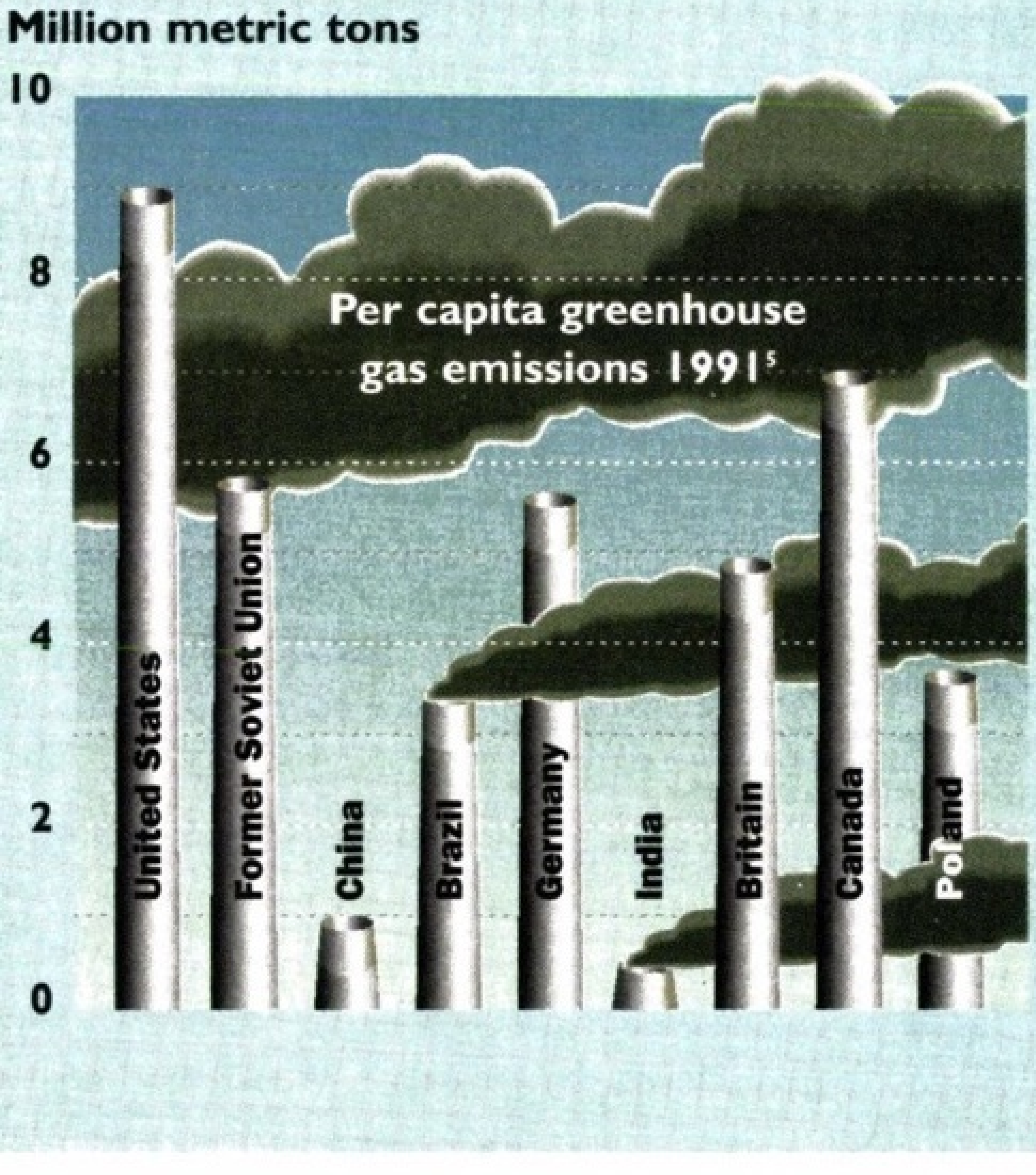
◆ In India watertables are falling in several states including the Punjab, India's 'breadbasket', where the level is dropping by more than one metre a year.[4]

### Up in Smoke

Human activity, especially the burning of fossil fuels, is increasing greenhouse gases like $CO_2$, methane and nitrous oxide. As a result the atmosphere traps heat rays that normally bounce back into space, causing global warming.

◆ Since the industrial revolution atmospheric concentrations of $CO_2$ have increased 25%. Emissions from fossil fuels have increased almost 400% since 1950.[5]

◆ The hottest ten years in recorded history have occurred since 1980. Oceanographers now believe average global temperature changes of up to 7° C (enough to melt polar icecaps) can occur within a brief 30-40 year period.



## Mind the gap

**Despite an apparent increase in global growth and steadily increasing per capita income, the gap both within and between rich and poor countries is widening.**

**Share of Global Income Over Time**

| Year | Richest 20% | Poorest 20% | Ratio of Rich/Poor |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1960 | 70.2 | 2.3 | 30:1 |
| 1970 | 73.9 | 2.3 | 32:1 |
| 1980 | 76.3 | 1.7 | 45:1 |
| 1989 | 82.7 | 1.4 | 59:1 |

◆ In 1960 the richest fifth of the world's population received 70% of global income compared to 2.3% for the world's poorest 20%. By 1989 the richest 20% had increased their share to 82.7% while the bottom fifth saw their share of global income shrink from 2.3% to 1.4%.[6]

◆ In Brazil the richest 20% earn 28 times as much as the poorest 20%. In the US from 1977-89 the average real income of the top 1% increased by 78% while the poorest 20% of the population saw their income decrease by 10.4%[7]

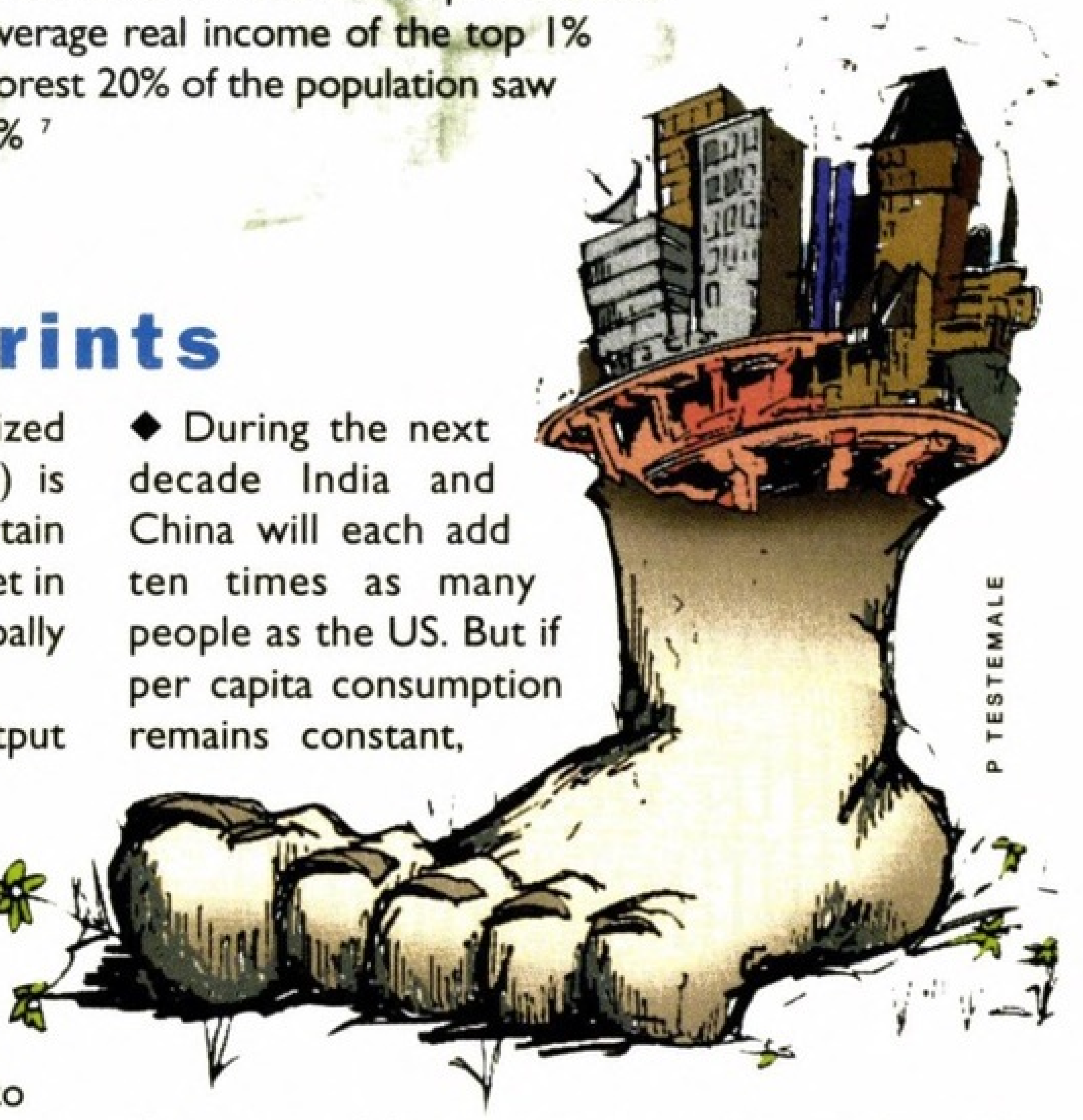
## Ecological footprints

◆ The 'ecological footprint' of industrialized countries (resources consumed per person) is huge: 4-6 hectares of land are needed to maintain the average consumer lifestyle in the North. Yet in 1990 the total available productive land globally was only 1.7 hectares per person.

◆ Holland for example consumes the output equivalent to 14 times as much productive land as is contained within its own borders. The deficits are expropriated from the resources of lower-income countries.

◆ Currently the human economy consumes about 40% of the earth's total yearly plant production. If the earth's population doubles to 10 billion in the next 35 years we will consume 80% of annual biomass production without increasing living standards for the poor majority.[8]

◆ During the next decade India and China will each add ten times as many people as the US. But if per capita consumption remains constant, the impact of American consumption on the environment could exceed the impact of both Third World nations combined.[9]



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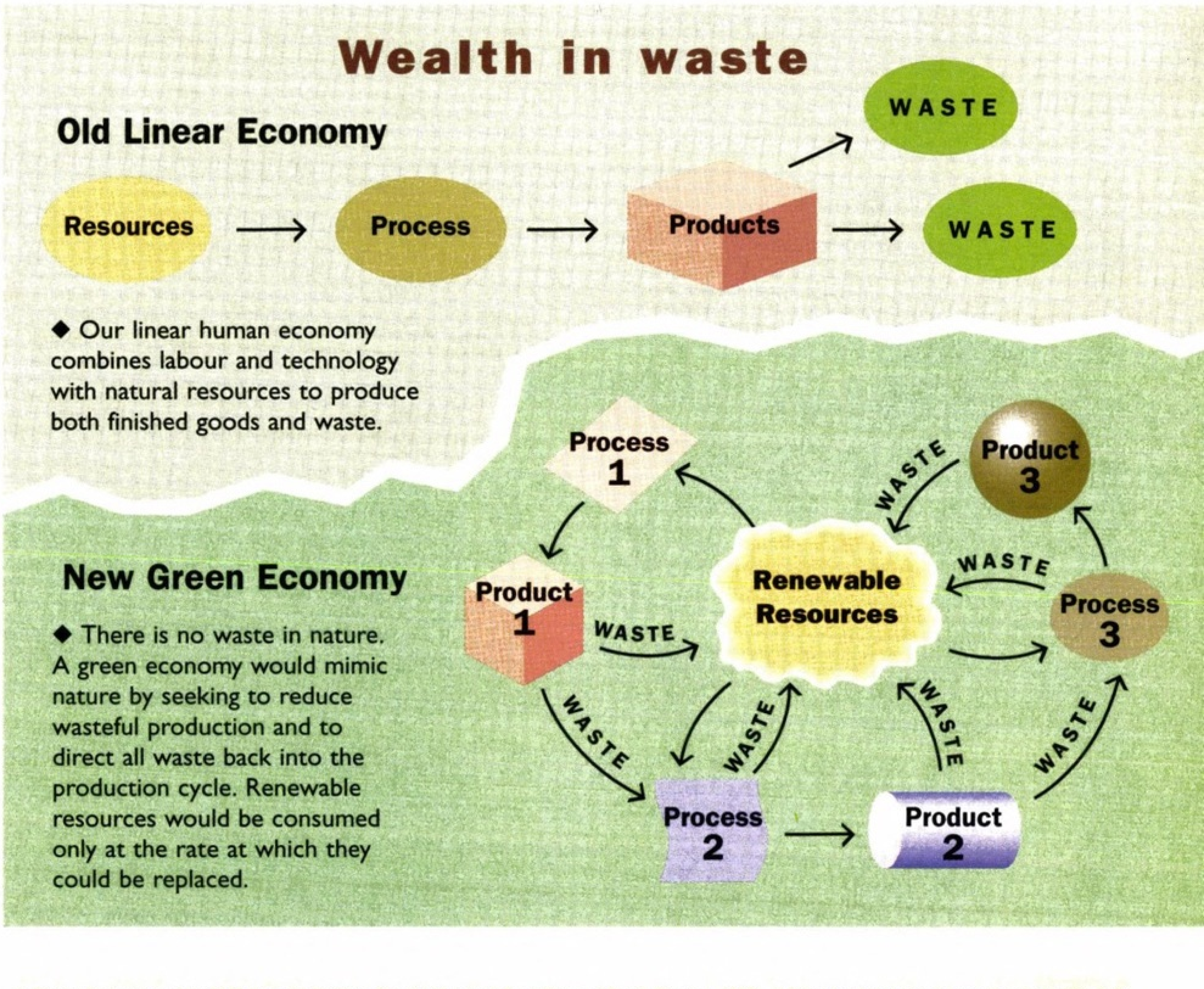
## Wealth in waste



### Old Linear Economy

◆ Our linear human economy combines labour and technology with natural resources to produce both finished goods and waste.

### New Green Economy

◆ There is no waste in nature. A green economy would mimic nature by seeking to reduce wasteful production and to direct all waste back into the production cycle. Renewable resources would be consumed only at the rate at which they could be replaced.

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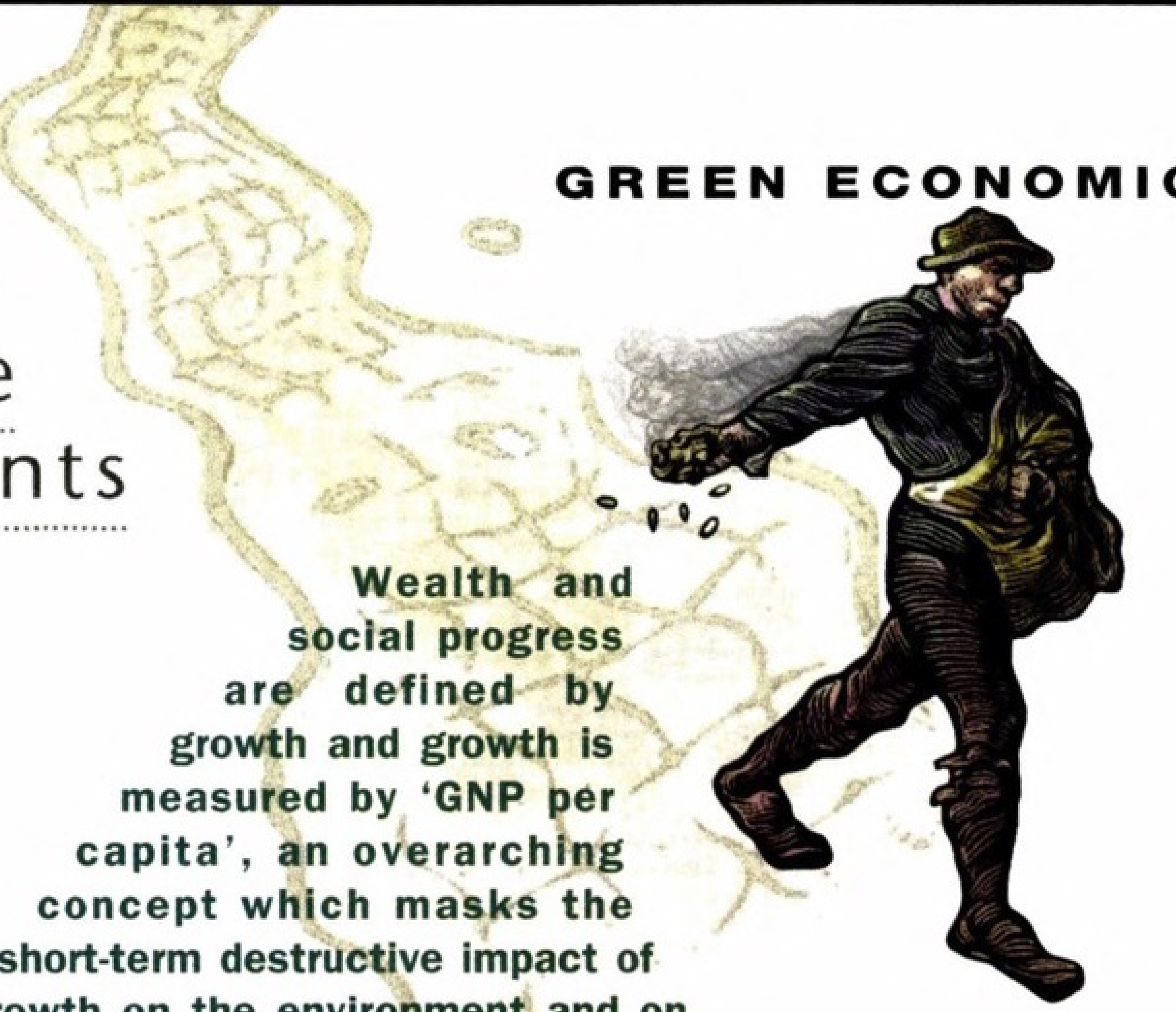
1 Originally developed by H Daly and J Cobb in *For the Common Good* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1989) 2 'Nature's Limits' by Lester Brown in *State of the World 1995* (Worldwatch Institute, Washington, DC, 1995) 3 'Facing Food Insecurity' by Lester Brown, op cit 2 4 Cited in 'Carrying Capacity: Earth's Bottom Line' by Sandra Postel in *State of the World 1994* (Worldwatch Institute, Washington, DC, 1994) 5 *World Resources, A guide to the Global Environment 1994/95* (World Resources Institute, UNEP and UNDP, Oxford University Press, 1995) 6 *Human Development Report*, UN Development Programme (Oxford University Press, 1992) 7 Cited in *When Corporations Rule the World*, David C Korten (Kumarian Press, 1995) 8 'Ecological footprints and appropriated carrying capacity: measuring the natural capital requirements of the human economy', by William Rees and Mathis Wackernagel in *Investing in Natural Capital* (Island Press, Washington, DC, 1994) 9 Cited in *Earth Island Journal*, Autumn 1995, p19.

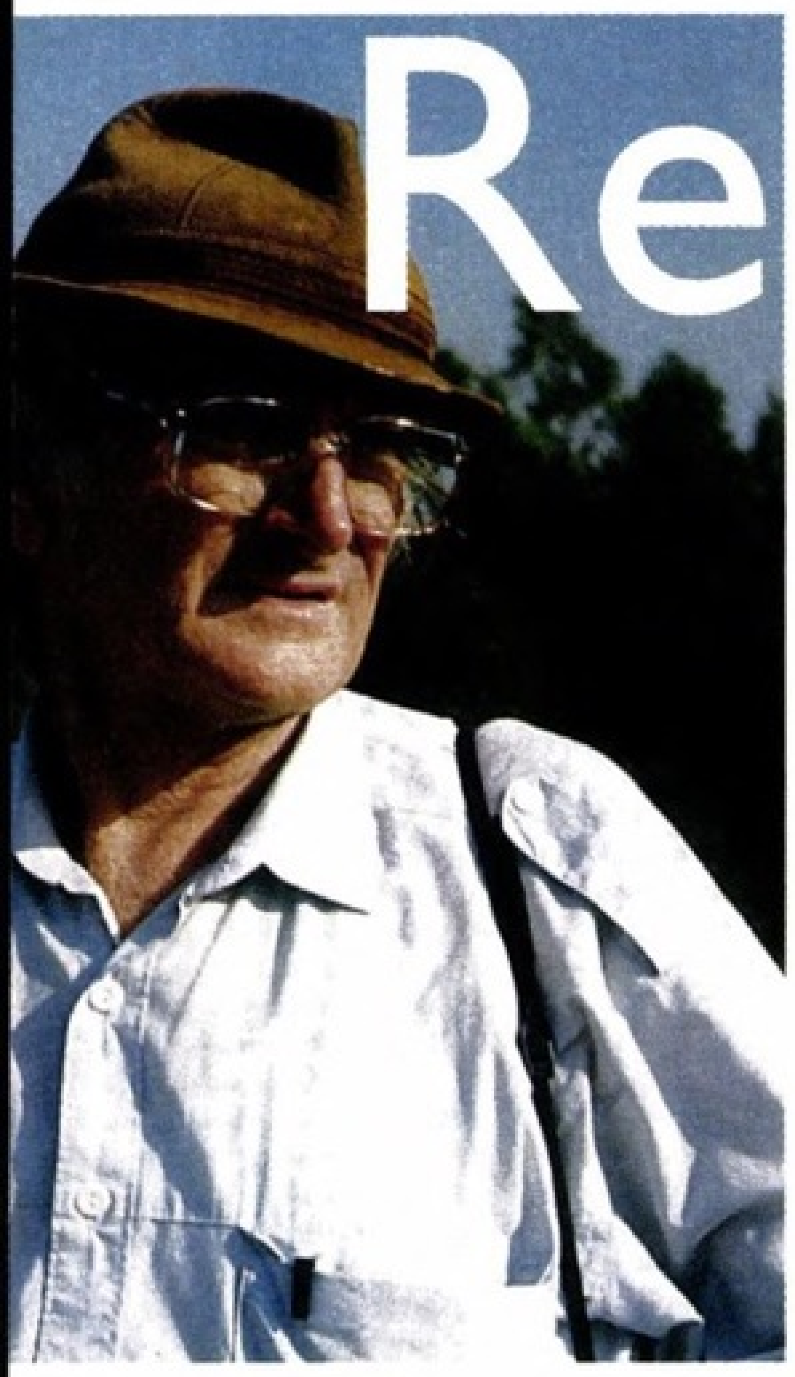
## Measure what counts

**Wealth and social progress are defined by growth and growth is measured by 'GNP per capita', an overarching concept which masks the short-term destructive impact of growth on the environment and on people. Instead of growth as a goal, a green economy would focus on improving human welfare, broadening the concept of wealth and organizing the production system to meet everyone's needs.**



# Re-thinking progress

**José Lutzenberger** examines the way that economists measure wealth and concludes that the gauge is both seriously warped and ultimately dangerous.



Lutzenberger: 'We need a completely new way to measure national wealth.'

TODAY we find ourselves in an absurd situation. Twenty per cent of us, mostly in the so-called First World but also the rich elsewhere, live a suicidal lifestyle that is simply not sustainable. There is hardly a patch on this Earth that we are not yet in some way exploiting or getting ready to exploit for our orgies of consumption. We are messing up all life-support systems and this cannot continue much longer.

Yet all our economic thinking is based on the premise that the whole planet should develop like the US or Germany. 'Progress' is measured by what economists call the Gross National Product (GNP). GNP *as a measure of progress* is the most stupid, the most absurd and the most pernicious index that could ever have been thought of by a discipline that calls itself scientific. GNP was originally meant to be only a measure of total income; therefore it is the sum of all the money that flows in an economy, without asking why that money flows or what causes it to flow. Whenever money changes hands somebody has an income, though this says nothing about what that income is for. As used today it is nonsense. When robbers and bandits cause money to flow it also increases GNP. When a plane crashes, say a 747 jumbo-jet, that moves more than a hundred million dollars, the amount the airline receives from the insurance company. When the airline buys a new plane, the GNP grows by the same amount again. And if there are survivors all the medical and healthcare costs will also increase the GNP, as will the bills of the undertakers who bury the dead. So the more accidents and calamities we have, the better.

Here's another aspect. Suppose you are the owner of a pub and you buy a barrel of beer at a price X. After you sold the beer to your customers you had a turnover of 2X and you had a lot of expenses, too. A sane business person would take the 2X minus X and then subtract all the expenses. Whatever is left would be profit. But what do governments do? They add the X (the cost of the beer) plus the 2X, the income from it, plus the expenses. They add everything because they start with the idea that every time money changes hands, somebody gets an income. But they don't ask what that income is doing to the economy. I might as well, if I am the owner of that pub, buy beer at 2X and sell it at X. I would have a high turnover and would feel great. Unfortunately I would be broke. And this is the kind of calculation that most governments make.

Today in my country, Brazil, we are flooding thousands of square kilometres of pristine rainforest to make electricity for three mills that export aluminium. In our national accounts the foreign earnings from exporting the aluminium are added to the GNP, but nowhere do we deduct for the permanent loss of the ore or the demolition of the mountains. In another operation 100,000 square kilometres of forest were destroyed for charcoal to make pig iron for export to Europe. And nowhere do we deduct anything of that sort from our national accounts.

So I would say we need a completely different index to measure progress, one that takes into account losses as well as gains in national wealth. When we make a new superhighway and cover thousands of hectares of agricultural land with pavement we need to deduct that from our capital, including all future productivity lost. In my business I add up all my income plus my existing capital and deduct all my costs and my depreciation. I have tractors and trucks and cranes. When a machine breaks down I deduct it from my capital; as my machines age they are written off. But there is no write-off in our national accounts. Every country today is poorer than it was ten years ago. The irony is we all consider ourselves richer.

According to present economic thinking the economy is only healthy when it grows. An economy that doesn't grow is sick. But how long can something grow? It is really incredible to see that what economists and public administrators call growth is mostly demolition – the demolition of nature, the demolition of life-support systems. In Holland, for example, about 20 per cent of the country is covered by buildings and pavement and that has doubled in the last two decades. When I first saw Amsterdam – that was in the early 1950s – it was a marvellous, beautiful city. Today when driving from Amsterdam to the airport there is a stretch of 20 kilometres of the most ugly type of development, big factories and supermarkets. Thousands of hectares of previously productive farmland are now gone. How long can this continue? How much growth can there be before there is no more place to grow crops to feed people? Twenty per cent? Forty per cent? Eighty per cent?

Added to this is the new doctrine of globalization. Everything must be produced where it can be produced cheapest. If pencils can be produced cheaper in Australia than in Holland, then the Dutch should import them from Australia. And everything should be available everywhere. We in Brazil already buy Dutch beer and the Dutch buy Mexican beer. The basic philosophy of this new religion is never explicitly stated. All previous great religions and political movements had explicit doctrines, explained in their catechisms, holy books or manifestos. But modern industrialism has no prophet and no holy book. It is presented only implicitly, in everything that politicians say, yet everyone accepts it as common sense.

When I was a young man in the 1940s, my home town of Porto Alegré in southern Brazil had 300,000 inhabitants. We had no slums. Workers at the time lived a modest life. They were not rich, they were humble; but they had their own pride and a satisfying life. They owned their own house, usually made of wood and they owned their own lot. Then at the beginning of the 1950s there appeared almost overnight what we called the 'villages fallen from the sky'. They were slum communities that began to spring up everywhere around the edges of big cities. Almost no-one in government is questioning the economic thinking that led to this sad situation.

Worldwide, over the last 50 years several hundred million people have been driven off their land as a result of industrialization and modern agriculture. Today there are nearly six billion people in the world and about three billion are still rural, living in traditional social structures. If globalization of the economy continues another billion people may be uprooted over the next 20 years, with unforseeable consequences in terms of social havoc.

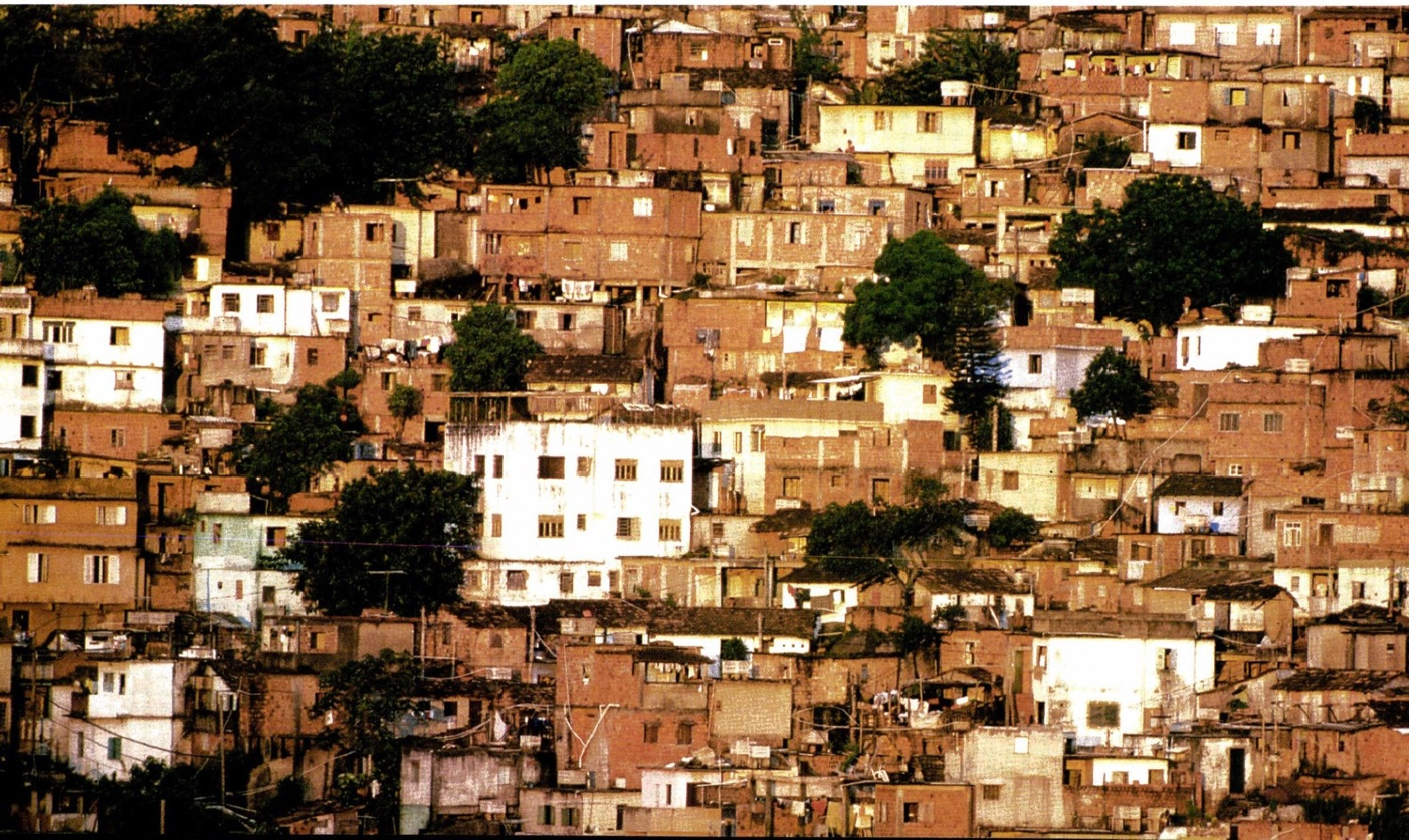
Recently I spent a week in Austria where farmers told me how scared they are of the European Common Market. They know thousands of Austrian farmers will lose their farms due to cheap food imports. And in fact this is already happening. In the Moselle Valley, in Germany, you can see vineyards turning to scrub on the higher slopes. When you talk to the old people who are still harvesting, they say: 'When we retire our children will not be able to continue.' Traditions hundreds of years old are disappearing.

We must realise that all these new free-trade arrangements, NAFTA, GATT and so on, were not made to benefit ordinary people. They were conceived by the powerful for the powerful. Transnational corporations need global markets, not only to get cheap resources from the Third World, but also to destroy within their own countries the social conquests of their workers. In Mexico, the Indian peasants in Chiapas who rose against NAFTA know they will end up in urban shantytowns as soon as Mexican borders are opened to the products of American agribusiness. American industrial workers also protested against NAFTA because they know that, with increasing misery in Mexico, American jobs will be exported there.

All over the world today, long-established communities that grew organically,

*If globalization continues, a billion people may be uprooted over the next 20 years*

Rocinha, one of Brazil's largest shantytowns on the edge of Rio de Janeiro. Industrial development has destroyed rural communities and disrupted traditional social relationships.



JOHN MAIER / STILL PICTURES

that are ecologically sustainable and that give people a feeling of belonging and meaning are being torn apart. Whether they are peasants, artisans, rubber tappers in the Amazon or indigenous people, they are all being disempowered, demoralized and uprooted. When the Indian peasants in Chiapas have to give up, it is cultural genocide. Every one of those Indian cultures in Mexico speaks a different language, has different traditions, different dances, different music. When they leave, their land is taken over by cattle ranchers and their culture is gone, the language is gone. And a language that disappears is like a species that disappears – it will never, never come back. It is the accumulated wisdom of thousands of years of human history, just as a species is the accumulated wisdom of millions of years of natural evolution.

> *We must learn to look at nature as something sacred... or we will have no future*

Today most governments bow to the wisdom of the marketplace. It is true that the market is a good mechanism to find balance between opposing interests. But the market must be complete; all interests must be present and it must not be allowed to be manipulated, otherwise it is blind. Consider the fellow who lives with his family on the sidewalk in Calcutta and whose only wealth is his loincloth. He has tremendous necessities, but he has no money, therefore no demand. There are billions of people who have tremendous necessities, but they are not present in the market.

The market is also blind to Creation. The symphonic process of organic evolution that put us here has taken three billion years. And we are but one species among I don't know how many millions – all of them important for the functioning of the living planet, *Gaia*. Never in the history of life has there been anything like what is happening today. Every year thousands of species are being lost forever.

And we call this 'progress'. But how can this be? Shouldn't progress mean increased well-being and harmony and a feeling of belonging for a growing number of people in a more sustainable and more beautiful world? If so then what we witness today has nothing to do with progress. I suggest it's time to redefine what we mean by progress and what we mean by development.

We need to rethink the fundamental tenets of our economic system. But we must go much, much further. Modern industrial society is based on an absurd worldview, a worldview that we inherited from our Judaeo-Christian past. We see ourselves destined to conquer and exploit nature when in fact we are only part of it. It is now time to abandon this anthropocentric view and look to the values in many of those cultures that we call backward. We must learn to look at Nature, at Creation, as something sacred of which we humans are only part – or we will have no future. We need a new, actually very old, holistic ethics, an ethics of reverence for Life in all its forms and manifestations. ■

**José Lutzenberger** is an ecologist and former Brazilian Minister of the environment.

Peasant farmer on his maize plot in Chiapas, Mexico: a language that disappears is like a species that disappears.

RON GILLING / PANOS PICTURES

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**Jan Tilden** describes how the co-operative spirit thrives in Maleny, Queensland.

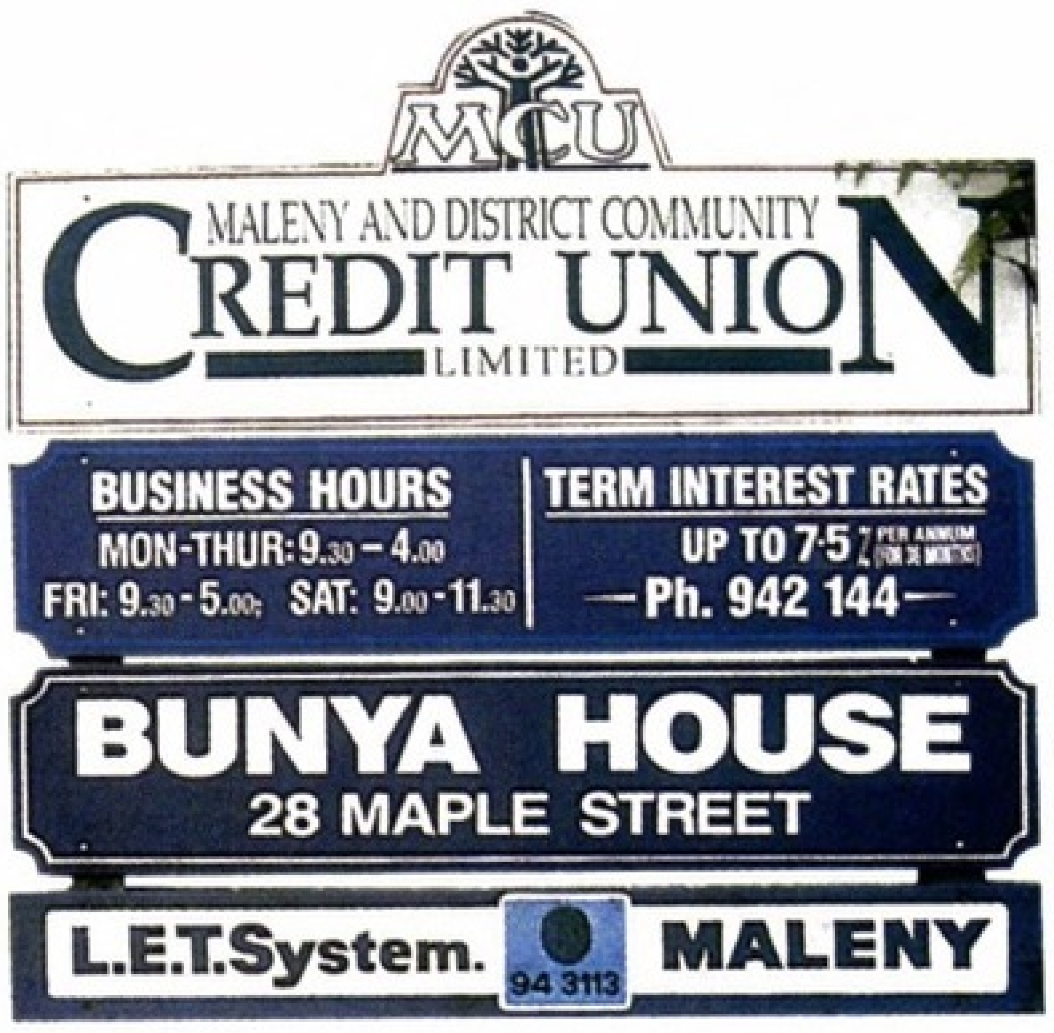
About 80 kilometres north of Brisbane a road runs west from the coastal plain, winding up a steep spur. Near the top the road narrows dramatically as it skirts a cliff. A rainforest gully drops away from the edge and there is just enough room for two cars to pass. The temperature drops noticeably. Locals call this section 'the ice box'. Once you pass through, gum trees and bladey grass abruptly give way to rolling green hills and dark pockets of remnant forest as you enter the township of Maleny.

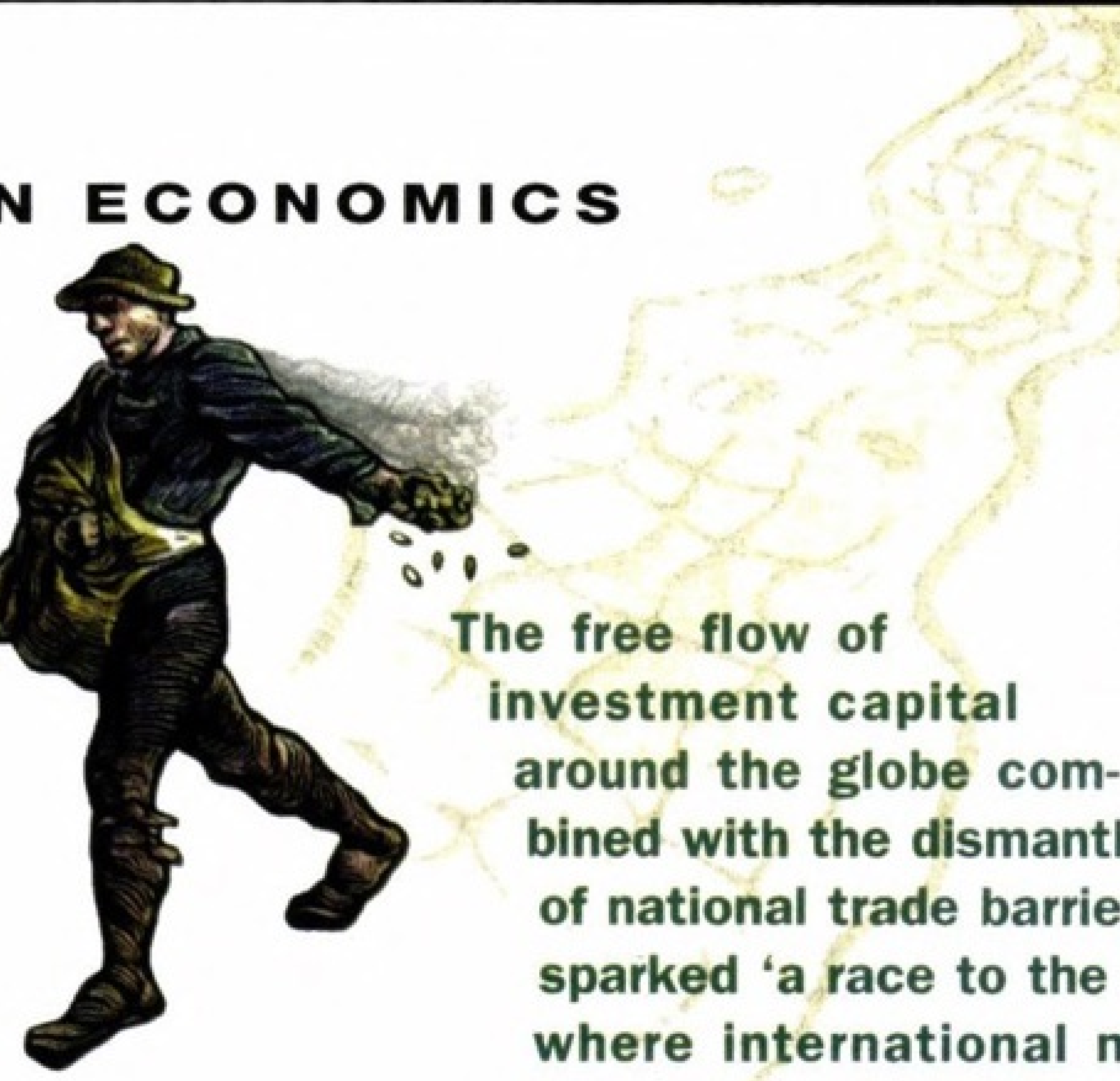
When I moved to this part of Queensland 22 years ago, the road was narrower and even more winding. Then it followed the original wagon track built to transport Maleny butter to market. From the early 1900s dairying was the mainstay of the local economy and it remained so until the early 1970s when hard times put many of the smaller farms out of business. While the landholders grazed cattle in the vacated paddocks, the empty cottages and sheds on these run-down dairies attracted a new wave of settlers – young urban Australians looking for a different way of life.

I was one of the first of these new settlers in the town. The small farm house I rented had no running water and unreliable electricity. Rent was $6.00 a week, about a tenth of what it would cost now. The farmer who owned it was embarrassed to charge me anything at all. Though not exactly welcoming, long-time locals were at least tolerant: if nothing else we citified newcomers were a source of good gossip.

Still, there was no indication in those days that we would soon have a major impact on Maleny and its flagging economy. And that we've done. Since 1979 we have set up more than a dozen new co-operatives in the town, ranging from land-settlement ventures, through main-street retail businesses to a community credit union.

Maple Street Co-op (a food co-op with a retail store in the busiest part of Maleny's main street) was the first of the new enterprises. Maple Street was opened in 1979 because we wanted to eat lentils, brown rice and fresh vegetables – not the range of tired, tinned produce then offered by the local supermarket. At our first meeting we passed around a piece of paper;





## Build local economies

**The free flow of investment capital around the globe combined with the dismantling of national trade barriers has sparked 'a race to the bottom', where international markets in the pursuit of profits, not sovereign governments, control the fate of nations. A green economy would move away from the ideology of global free trade and export-led growth to domestic production for local use. The end goal would be economic self-reliance: the productive resources of all countries directed to meet the needs of their own people as much as possible, trading in products and services only when necessary.**

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people wrote down what they ate and that became the basis for our stock list. We raised a small amount of capital by selling shares to our founding members. And we made two critical choices: we formed a Co-operative Society (a legal entity based on values we cherished, such as social equality and community involvement) and we opted to open on the main street. In the beginning shop fittings were donated and the shop was staffed by volunteers. As business grew people were paid for their work. All staff, including the co-ordinator, received the same hourly rate and we made great efforts to share power and responsibility as much as possible.

The Maple Street model was useful in setting up Maleny's next co-operative – The Maleny and District Community Credit Union. Founded in 1985 this new co-op aimed to keep money circulating within the area, to invest ethically and to lend to people not normally favoured by mainstream financial institutions. The last of these aims was underpinned by a strong sense of community. We believed that people would be more responsible to a small local organization for which they felt a sense of ownership.

Two years later an even more exciting and radical venture in alternative economics was piloted – a Local Exchange and Trading System (LETS). This computer-based barter scheme has one important advantage over traditional barter systems – exchanges of goods and services need not be made directly between two people. Credits earned from one person can be used to acquire goods or services from someone else. LETS functions like a local currency, except that neither credits nor debits accrue interest. (In Maleny the LETS unit is called a 'Bunya', named after a species of pine tree restricted to a couple of mountainous areas in southeast Queensland. The tree produces a large edible nut which was once prized by Aboriginal people.)

A LET system has the potential to buffer local economies from swings in the global economy. Goods and services in the Maleny area (say labour or organic fertilizer) can be exchanged for Bunyas and only the money outlay need be recouped in dollars. If there are no dollars to be had then Bunyas will do just as well, provided they can be exchanged for something the recipient wants. The Maleny LET scheme has worked so well that there are now more than 240 similar schemes operating throughout Australia.

Other Maleny co-ops founded since the LET system include Wastebusters, a recycling operation; Mountain Fare, a co-operative to develop economic opportunities for women; the Community Learning Centre (alternative education); Black Possum (publishing); several co-ops for settling people on land; Tribe (promoting indigenous foods); a co-operative community FM radio station and a co-operative club. The co-ops and the LET system were set up to meet community needs. But they've also helped boost the local economy and the town's spirit. Long-time locals will tell you Maleny has always been a community-spirited place, that the powerful sense of belonging one feels here is nothing new. But the important contribution of the co-ops has been to help maintain this community involvement and power through a time of rapid change.

I will risk speaking for Maleny's 'co-operators' in saying that we are proud of the contribution we have made. The self-respecting country-town atmosphere has not yet been overwhelmed by tourism or the march of suburbia across the countryside. Still, there is no real mystery in our accomplishments. Jill Jordan, a co-op activist and now member of local government, has it right when she quips: 'I spend a lot of time telling people elsewhere that Maleny is nowhere special. It's a process that can be repeated just about anywhere.' ■

**Jan Tilden** lives in Maleny and has been actively involved in the co-operative scene as member, director and employee of various co-ops for most of her 22 years there. She currently works for the town's newspaper, *The Range News*.

Gayle Butson (left) and Juliette Kalifa prepare organic produce inside Maleny's Maple Street Food Co-op.

JAN TILDEN

## Close the loops

**The industrial system is based on a linear model which assumes natural resources have no value in themselves. The result is an economy which processes large amounts of resources into waste as quickly as possible. A green economy would question superfluous consumption and seek to 'close the loops', to mimic cyclical natural systems so that waste becomes food, nothing is thrown away and symbiosis replaces competition.**

Designing industrial systems to behave like natural systems may be one way we can help to 'green' the planet. **Sean Kelly** and **Dave Redwood** investigate an experiment in rural Nova Scotia where there is more than meets the eye – and the nose.

# A living machine

Bear River, Nova Scotia, situated on the banks of the famous Bay of Fundy used to be a relatively quiet place. No more. 'It's been a nuthouse, just herds of people,' says Carol Armstrong, manager of the village's newest tourist attraction. Local inns, retail stores and the town's two restaurants have all reported big increases in business.

So what's generating all the excitement? Believe it or not visitors are flocking to the picture-postcard village (population 881) to gawk at a sewage treatment plant. And not just any sewage plant. The Bear River facility is an innovative wastewater treatment plant that relies on living organisms to do the dirty work.

Nestled in a river valley between steep hills next to the town's windmill, the glass structure looks like an ordinary greenhouse. Inside it's a different story: plants, snails, protozoa and algae – fuelled by the power of the sun – are busy breaking sewage down into clean water that flows into the tidal river. What the tourists are seeing in Bear River is a 'living machine', an award-winning example of designing like a natural ecosystem.

In Bear River even human waste is a resource that can be put to good use. Stepping through the sliding glass doors, one expects an odorous welcome. Instead, you are greeted with the humid, verdant-smelling air typical of any large greenhouse. Rows of clear-sided tanks are topped with an assortment of colourful vegetation: floating aquatic plants like duckweed, water hyacinth and mint, and non-aquatic varieties such as willow and dogwood suspended by netting, their roots continuing down into the nutrient-rich mixture. Snails cling to the inside of the transparent tanks, sucking up algae growth that blocks essential sunlight from reaching the water. A large indoor 'pond' contains more plants, including banana and fig trees.

Plant manager Carol Armstrong doubles as an enthusiastic tour-guide. She leads a constant stream of visitors through the voyage the waste takes before it flows into the river. Pumps first inject fine air bubbles into an underground tank of blended sewage. When combined with the bacteria Armstrong adds daily, this sewage becomes, quite literally, food for consumption. It enters the five-foot high tanks where bacteria, algae and protozoa are at work detoxifying many harmful microbes in the water. These organisms find a habitat on the roots of the larger plants suspended on the water's surface, which in turn absorb toxins not broken down by the smaller species.

'We tried some water lettuce and semi-tropical plants,' Armstrong says, sounding more like a farmer than a sewage treatment plant operator, 'but local varieties seem to do better than tropical ones so next spring I will be planting a lot of local stuff'. The plants are currently composted but she has plans to sell the ornamental flowers once more residents are hooked up to the plant. At the moment the facility operates at just a fifth of its capacity of 50,000 litres a day.

Gravity moves the stream of wastewater through the tanks, an indoor pond and finally to a small engineered marsh. There, grasses and irises absorb remaining toxins. A screen removes the last of the suspended solids and an ultraviolet light completes the

**What goes around comes around: floating vegetation feeding on sewage in the Bear River.**

PHOTOS: SEAN KELLY

'This place is magic.' Manager Carol Armstrong clutches a beaker of clean water, the end result of the 'living machine' treatment process.

process by disinfecting the water. The final chemical-free product is discharged into the river clean enough to drink. It's a world of difference from most conventional methods which, while sometimes using a limited number of organisms to treat sewage, are not symbiotic ecosystems and have to resort to chemicals like chlorine to 'clean' the water. As an added bonus the natural treatment facility is also less expensive to build and maintain.

Dr John Todd, the inventor of Bear River's 'living machine' process, has long advocated this kind of ecological design as the 'application of natural relationships to human need and to the integration of humanity with the larger natural world around us'. From Ocean Arks International, the Massachusetts-based research organization he established in 1980, Todd has become a modern-day prophet of the wide-ranging benefits of ecological design.

'You design a living machine with a whole range of ideas in mind,' he says. 'You could be designing it to treat waste water as in Bear River. Or you might be designing it for the production of foods; for the generation of fuels; for heating buildings in a cool climate; to integrate industrial activity with human settlement and agricultural activity.'

Ecological design, Todd believes, 'grows out of the place itself – the climate, biota, geology, topography. Whether it is urban or rural, First World or Third World. In fact, the opportunities for this in the tropics are just as great, or greater, than in the North.'

Industry too, Todd says, is beginning to recognize the economic benefits of living machines. 'We can go to a brewery now, for example, and tell them we can take a problem that is quite troubling or costly and clean it up and we can also create a secondary by-product – you can now grow food as a spin-off of the original activity. We are able to show many companies that they can comply with environmental standards and actually pay for the living machines, sometimes in as short a period as two years.'

The lessons of cyclical thinking also extend to the broader economy. Maximizing the use of non-renewable resources through durable design, re-use and recycling is one application of the philosophy. A more imaginative step is an industrial park where many businesses are integrated, symbiotic members of one common closed-loop system. The machine parts remain inert, but the natural cycle is adopted. The heat created in the manufacturing of one product fuels the energy needs of another.

In the Danish city of Kalundborg in the early 1970s a manufacturer decided to locate a large plant in the town's industrial park to take advantage of a nearby refinery's waste fuel-gas. The successful re-use of this by-product, which until then had simply been burned off, sparked other plant managers and some city officials to look into other efficiencies. They discovered there was tremendous heat disappearing up the stacks of the Asnaes coal-fired power station. Soon two companies and thousands of residents were heating their buildings with Asnaes steam. One of these companies, they also discovered, was drowning in a nitrogen and phosphorous-rich sludge. Soon nearly 1,000 nearby farms were welcoming a reliable supply of fertilizer from the industrial park. Over the years, manageable and easily understood arrangements such as these reinforced each other – to the point where seven industrial plants and thousands of farmers and city-dwellers are now connected in a web of exchanges involving an estimated three million tons of material annually.

Elsewhere products are also being designed for their entire life 'cycle'. The Environmental Protection Encouragement Agency of Germany promotes what they call Intelligent Products – products that are created so that when returned to the earth, they biodegrade without toxic effects. 'Durables' such as cars, televisions and refrigerators would not be sold but rather licensed from a company. The product would always belong to the original manufacturer, to be constructed, used and returned within a closed-loop system. When a company knows their product will end back on their doorstep yet they cannot legally throw it away, decomposition, re-use and refurbishment soon become central pillars of design.

Of course these ideas do not address a primary cause of our growing ecological crisis: over-consumption. And John Todd would prefer to see more of our economy incorporate natural living organisms. 'Industrial ecology is a little artificial, but when industry gets to the point of exchanging energy and nutrients, then it does become like ecology – in the sense that there is mutual sharing going on.'

'Humans have to learn to do that. I do foresee a time when communities are designed as ecosystems: in a sense very large living machines within which people live and work, do their civic function, their education and their manufacturing.'

*Even human waste is a resource that can be put to good use*

Back in Bear River, this new thinking is taking root. Their living machine enjoys extraordinary grassroots support and the community continues to build on this spirit of co-operation and pragmatic optimism. The town's citizens have transformed a closed school into an arts centre and a recently abandoned bank building into a community health clinic. As Carol Armstrong says: 'This place is magic.' You can almost smell it in the air. ■

**Sean Kelly** and **Dave Redwood** live in Halifax, Nova Scotia. where Sean is editor of the *Sustainable TIMES* and Dave works with youth and environmental groups.

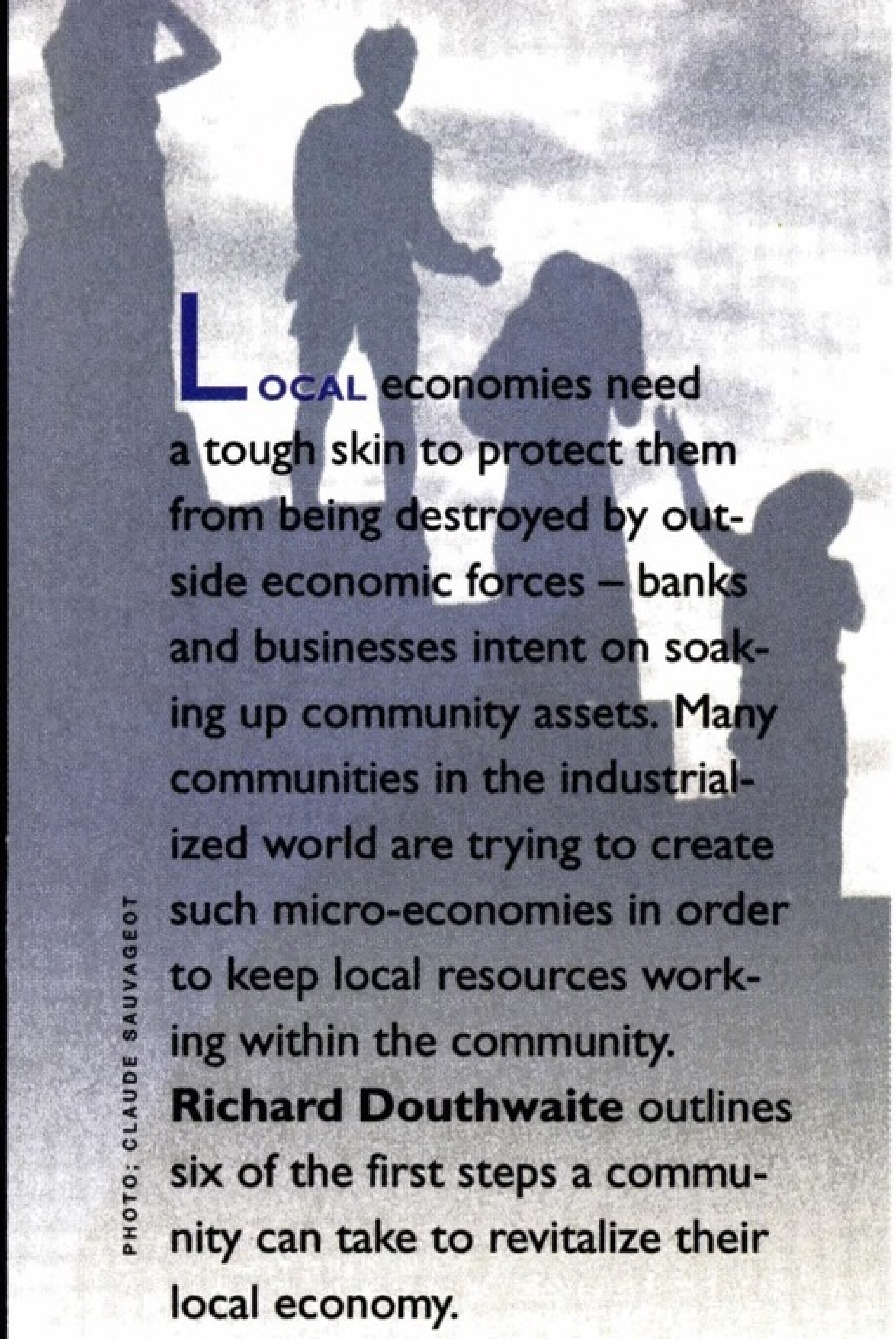


PHOTO: CLAUDE SAUVAGEOT

LOCAL economies need a tough skin to protect them from being destroyed by outside economic forces – banks and businesses intent on soaking up community assets. Many communities in the industrialized world are trying to create such micro-economies in order to keep local resources working within the community. **Richard Douthwaite** outlines six of the first steps a community can take to revitalize their local economy.

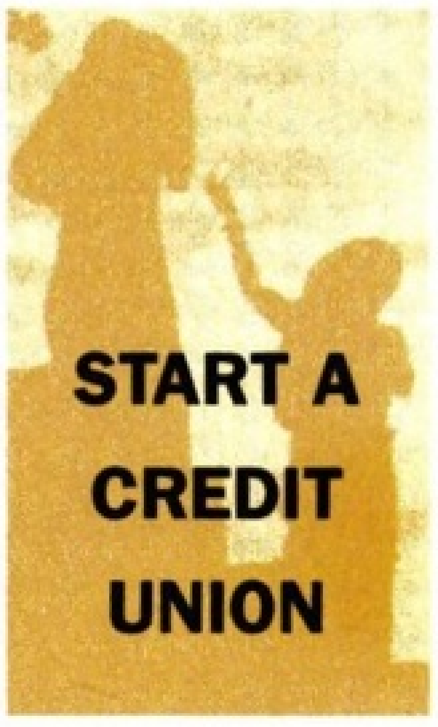
### CREATE YOUR OWN CURRENCY

**PROBLEM:** If people use money earned from outside to trade among themselves, their trading is exposed to fluctuations in the national or international economy.

**COMMUNITY SOLUTION:** On the rugged Beara Peninsula of Ireland's Atlantic coast residents set up a Local Exchange and Trading system (LETS) in 1992 so they could use their own money to trade with each other. As a result their difficulties will be minimized if the Irish economy falters or the tourist season fails.

**OPERATION:** A common feature of LET systems is that the money does not exist physically. When one member sells something or does a job for another, she is paid with a special cheque denominated in the local unit. (In Beara the unit is called a 'Hag'.) Cheques are lodged with the system's accountant who keeps records of all transactions on a computer and issues each member with a statement at regular intervals.

**RESULTS:** At present the most active 25 members do an average of $200 worth of LETS business each month, which is high compared with systems elsewhere. A LET system's value is not solely economic, however. It is also a powerful way of building community and making new friends. Around 1,000 other places, mostly in the English-speaking world, have similar systems.



### START A CREDIT UNION

**PROBLEM:** If people put their savings into an outside bank or pension fund their money will only be made available to families or businesses in their area if they can afford to pay as high an interest rate as the bank can obtain elsewhere in the world.

**COMMUNITY SOLUTION:** In 1971 the people of Port Antonio, Jamaica, like those in thousands of other communities throughout the world, set up the Portland Credit Union (Portland is the parish covering the east of Jamaica) to recycle their savings locally and keep them out of the hands of the international banks.

**OPERATION:** Credit unions are owned and run co-operatively and have very low operating costs which enables them to charge lower interest rates than banks and to keep their rates constant while still paying depositors a better interest rate than their rivals.

**RESULTS:** The worldwide credit union movement began in Germany in the 1840s. Today the movement is particularly strong in the US where an estimated 54 million people participate.

### HOLD LAND IN TRUST

**PROBLEM:** As an area becomes more prosperous real-estate prices generally rise. This benefits outside landowners and richer members of the community but makes life more expensive and difficult for anyone without real estate.

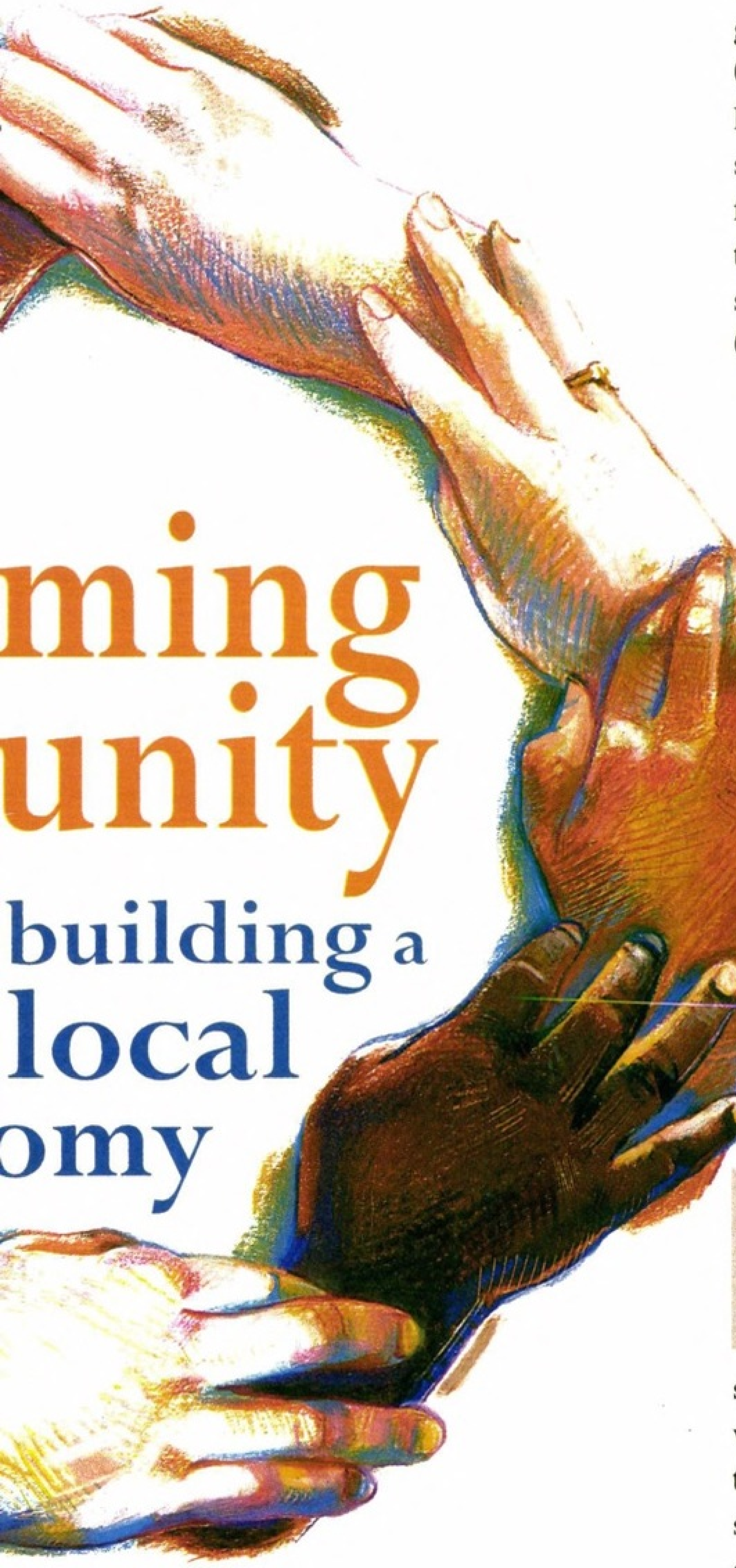
**COMMUNITY SOLUTION:** Robert Swann started the Community Land Trust of the South Berkshires in Great Barrington, Massachusetts in 1981. His house is in an apple orchard which belongs to the Trust. Community land trusts are based on the belief that land is not something which should be bought and sold to make a profit. Instead it should be held in trust for future generations.

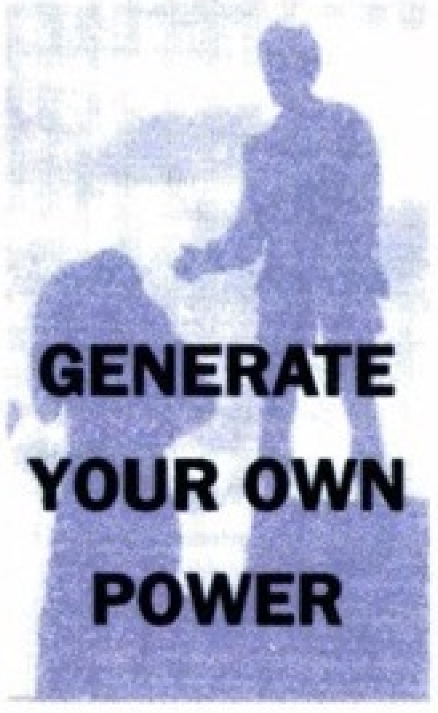
# Reclai comm

## Steps to healthy econ

**OPERATION:** The Trust first borrowed to buy the orchard at full market price and made four house sites available on part of it. Residents are charged a lease fee for the land though the houses are owned. However, an owner who wishes to sell has to offer the house to the trustees who are only obliged to pay replacement value.

**RESULTS:** The lease fees have paid off the initial loan and enabled the orchard to be kept in cultivation which would otherwise have been impossible. The trust has bought two other properties, one of which is part nature reserve as well as a site for well-designed, moderately priced houses. Swann's promotion of the land-trust idea has led to the establishment of almost 200 similar trusts throughout the US.





### GENERATE YOUR OWN POWER

**PROBLEM:** People in industrialized nations spend a fifth of their income buying energy from unsustainable, environmentally-damaging fossil-fuel sources. Any community aiming for a more independent local economy should give high priority to meeting its energy needs from local renewable sources.

**COMMUNITY SOLUTION:** Vederso in Denmark moved in this direction in 1986 by setting up a co-operatively-owned wind farm. Each family paid around $8,000 for their share, mostly in loans from the local savings bank to be repaid over ten years.

**OPERATION:** Payments for the wind farm's electricity are paid straight into the savings bank by the power company which buys it. The bank then calculates how much money goes to each member and credits their accounts. Once their loans are paid off the members get almost free electricity.

**RESULTS:** Similar community wind co-ops have been set up all over Denmark. The movement now has 52,500 members and generates three per cent of the country's electricity.

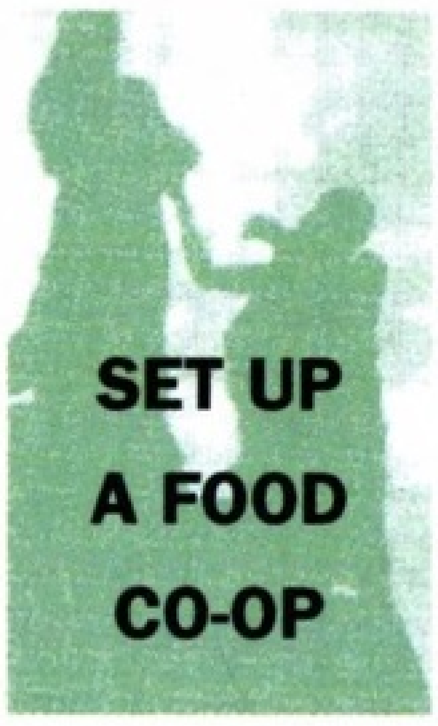
### SUPPORT LOCAL FARMERS

**PROBLEM:** In most industrial countries farm produce travels hundreds of miles through a long, complex supply-chain before it arrives in a local supermarket or corner store. As a result purchasers have no contacts with farmers and no knowledge of the way their food is produced while farmers themselves often get less than a fifth of the amount the customer pays.

**COMMUNITY SOLUTION:** In Buschberghof outside Hamburg a Community Supported Agriculture scheme (CSA) was set up in 1968. Its land, buildings, machinery and livestock are owned by a land trust. The farmer whose family had worked the farm for generations decided that he would rather give it away than lose it by continuing to farm along conventional lines.

**OPERATION:** The trust allows a group of farmers to use the land and buildings rent-free. The farmers estimate each year how much the farm will cost to operate and each family decides for itself how much of this amount it ought to pay. All the produce belongs to the families and they can order as much as they want.

**RESULTS:** The farmers grow all the food required by 90 Hamburg families – meat, milk, cheese, butter, bread, eggs, fruit and vegetables. There are now more than 600 CSA groups in the US and Canada. As in Germany these families have banded together to establish direct links with farmers, often paying for their food in advance.



### SET UP A FOOD CO-OP

**PROBLEM:** In many places big corporations have a stranglehold on the food-retailing system, making it difficult for local producers to find a local market.

**COMMUNITY SOLUTION:** In Dublin, a food co-op has been running for 12 years, buying wholefoods in bulk and dividing them up among its members on Saturdays in a rented hall. Communities which operate a food co-op provide themselves with a community-owned distribution system and a way of linking and strengthening other local economic activities.

**OPERATION:** The venue provides an ideal place for craftworkers and organic farmers to sell their products. They rent stalls in the hall and the weekly event is an important social occasion.

**RESULTS:** The co-op formed the basis for the first LET system in the city and is backing a community-supported garden. Elsewhere food co-ops have been taken up in different ways and adapted to stop the erosion of local institutions. In England the Village Retail Services Association (ViRSA) has been set up to advise communities on how to re-open or retain their village shops. Like the Dublin food co-op, a community shop is a focal point and meeting place as well as an important source of household goods, basic foods and the best of local produce. ■

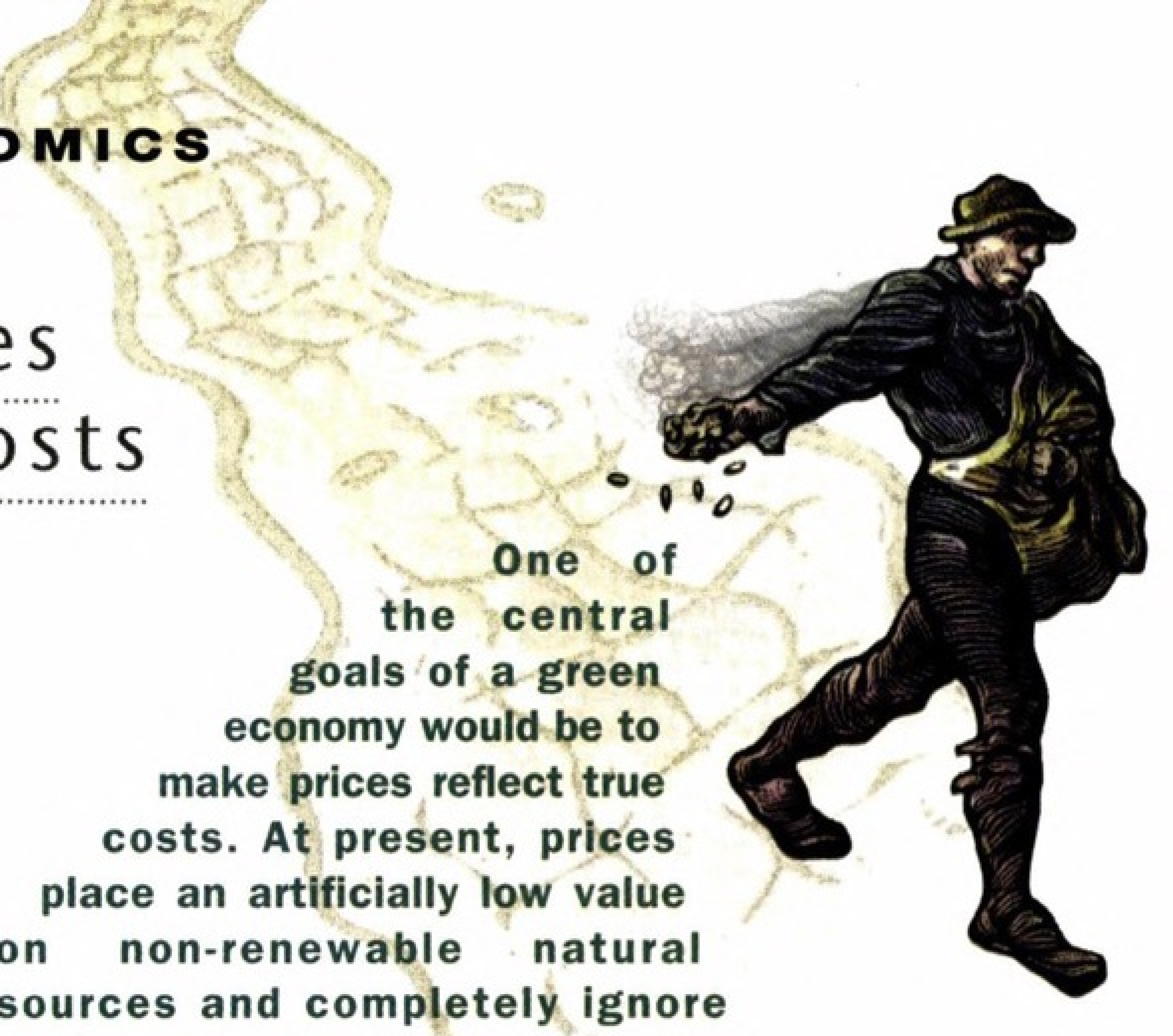
**Richard Douthwaite** writes on environmental issues from County Mayo, Ireland.

ILLUSTRATION: SARAH JOHN

# Eco-taxes

A radical green approach to taxation could both reduce bureaucracy and help save the environment.

**James Robertson** explains.



## Make prices reflect costs

**One of the central goals of a green economy would be to make prices reflect true costs. At present, prices place an artificially low value on non-renewable natural resources and completely ignore external costs – to the air, the water, the soil, to future generations, to workers' health. The whole economic system is geared to keeping these costs 'externalized'. A green economy would adjust prices to include real costs and would institute a system of 'green taxes' to drive this forward.**

Green taxes began with the simple aim of discouraging people from damaging the environment by making them pay for using natural resources. For example, burning fossil fuels in power stations causes acid rain; it damages the environment and should be taxed. Raising the tax on motor fuel would encourage people to use more energy-efficient cars or to use them less, or both. Taxing the dumping of waste in landfill sites would encourage recycling and alternative ways of dealing with waste and might help to reduce the total amount of waste we create. And so on.

That original aim still applies. But it is no longer the only one. Green taxes are now seen as part of a wider restructuring of taxation – eco-tax reform – which will encourage not just environmentally sustainable development but also better economic performance, more jobs and greater economic justice within and between nations. One reason green taxes make sense from an economic, social and environmental point of view is because they tax 'bads' instead of 'goods'.

Recent studies in Britain, the US and by the European Commission have found that replacing existing taxes on employment, incomes and profits ('goods') with taxes on energy use ('bad') can yield a threefold dividend: better overall national economic performance; higher levels of employment; and a cleaner environment. Their goal should be to shift the balance between the use of human resources (now under-employed) and natural resources (now over-employed).

However, critics charge that green taxes are regressive because they hit poorer people relatively harder than richer. For example, if a tax on household energy raised the cost of heating, cooking and lighting, poor people would find it harder to pay and harder to invest in energy efficiency to reduce the higher rates. The regressive effect would be all the greater if green taxes replaced taxes on incomes and profits – which many poorer people never had to pay in the first place.

This objection can be met in three ways: first, studies in Germany and Switzerland have found that if the revenue from energy taxes were distributed equally as an 'eco-bonus' to all households, low-income families would benefit most. This 'citizen's income' would have a progressive effect since the same amount of money is worth relatively more to poor people than rich.

Secondly, while it's true that a tax which falls on consumers 'downstream' at the end of the economic pipe will hit poor people harder than rich (on household energy for example), a tax 'upstream' at the beginning of the economic pipe will not be so regressive. Why? Because it will affect, not just people's *spending* on energy as consumers, but also all *incomes* (including salaries, dividends, rents and capital appreciation) derived from energy-using production. This means it will fall more heavily on rich earners than poor ones. This is the kind of green tax we need.

And thirdly, green taxes must be part of a larger package of taxes which will make people pay for using *common* resources. The most obvious of these taxes will be a tax (or a 'rent') on the value of land – proposed by the American economist Henry George a century ago and opposed by wealthy interests ever since. Among others could be taxes on the use of radio frequencies, space or the oceans. Because these taxes will hit rich people's *incomes* harder than poor people's (like an energy tax at source) they will not be regressive.

Opponents also suggest that hundreds of different green taxes would be burdensome and confusing, creating a wave of political problems as each new tax appeared to target a particular section of society. And that is true as far as it goes. However, the right approach will be to use a comparatively small number of taxes which impact the economy 'upstream'. These would then cascade down through the whole economy, creating a systemic disincentive to environmentally-damaging activities of all kinds, affecting all sections of society without discrimination. A tax on fossil fuel and nuclear energy *at source* is a good example. Energy-intensive activities like agribusiness and road transport almost always involve high levels of pollution and intensive use of resources. So taxing energy at source will help to reduce resource use and pollution at every level and in every sector of the economy.

If green taxes are successful they will reduce the wholesale destruction of natural resources. And eventually this will mean less revenue from the tax. If government finances depend on green taxes this could be a serious problem. But it is a problem that must and can be avoided. Green taxes will need to be phased in at steadily rising rates over a period of 10 to 15 years, so the total revenue from them should rise for at least that long. Afterwards, human activities will still depend on using energy and other natural resources: even when their use has fallen to sustainable levels, people will continue to use them. Widening the principle of green taxes to include taxes on the use of all common resources like land, radio frequencies, the oceans and so on would result in a new tax base adequate for future needs, though very different from the present one.

For economists, the function of green taxes is to 'internalize' costs now 'externalized'. People and companies should be made to pay all the costs of their activities, instead of being allowed to impose them on other people, including other parts of the world and future generations. Ideally, green taxes should be set at rates that reflect these 'true' costs.

For example, the price of food produced by modern agriculture ignores the environmental costs of energy-intensive farms using large quantities of fertilizers, pesticides and soil-destroying machinery. Other costs are hidden when the food is then processed in energy-intensive factories, packaged and transported hundreds of miles to consumers. Ideally, green taxes would include all the 'true' present and future costs of the resources used – as well as the damage caused to the environment and human health at every stage of production, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal.

As an abstract idea this is insightful. But the reality is that hidden costs of production are so complex that it is impossible to come up with the 'true' price tag. As public and political pressure grows for eco-tax reform, the rates for green taxes will continue to be decided in a rougher and readier way – and that will do no great harm.

Coal-fired power stations, oil refineries and other energy-intensive and polluting industries naturally fear that green taxes will hit them hardest – and put them at a disadvantage in international competition. Those industries have already shown, in their opposition to proposed energy taxes in Europe and US, what a powerful lobby they can be.

On the other hand, most people will benefit as eco-tax reform helps to shift the balance from resource-intensive, environmentally-damaging production to people-centred activities. 'Sunrise industries' will benefit, including electronic and environmental technologies and the intellectual 'know-how' and 'software' occupations that go with them. And so will the whole range of industries and occupations – including health, education, entertainment and the arts – that rely mainly on the skills of people to deliver personal services. As it becomes more widely understood that the issue is eco-tax reform, not just a particular green tax, political support will grow.

*Taxing energy at source will help to reduce resource use and pollution*

We also can't think about green taxes without looking at the international dimension. As the recent World Commission on Global Governance put it: 'The time has come when we must seriously consider levying charges on the use of common global resources to finance common global purposes.' International green taxes could be a much-needed source of revenue for the UN. They could also encourage globally-sustainable development and economic justice between nations. For example, a global tax on each nation's chemical emissions would encourage the North to reduce the burden it now puts on the planet's capacity to

German farmer, flanked by a massive harvester, takes stock of his winter barley crop. Energy-intensive industrial farming hides the real costs of food production.

PHOTOS: THOMAS RAUPACH / STILL PICTURES

absorb atmospheric pollution. A significant part of the revenue might be distributed to all nations on a per capita basis – as an international 'citizen's income' recognizing everyone's rightful share of common global resources. In that way, financial transfers now seen as aid would be transformed into 'rental' payments, received as of right by the peoples of the South from the high-consuming, high-polluting peoples of the North for the higher-than-average use we make of common global resources.

Amusement for bored drivers trapped in a Mexico City traffic jam. Green taxes will discourage growing dependency on automobiles.

MARK EDWARDS / STILL PICTURES

Realistically, we should expect eco-tax reform to be a muddled and controversial process over many years – in one country after another and internationally. But it will gather pace, as the logic behind it becomes more widely understood and as programmes for phasing it in are drawn up.

It will contribute to national economic performance, environmental and social well-being and international economic justice – and also to political cohesion. People will no longer have cause to resent paying income taxes or giving aid to the Third World. Instead, they will pay for subtracting value – for using common resources which they have not themselves created. And all, by right, will receive their share of the value of those common resources. ■

**James Robertson** is the author of *Future Wealth: A New Economics for the 21st Century*. He is a trustee of the New Economics Foundation and a visiting fellow at the Green College (Oxford) Centre for Environmental Policy and Understanding.

## ACTION resources

### INTERNATIONAL

The Other Economic Summit (TOES), 777 UN Plaza, Ste 3C, New York, NY 10017 Tel: 212 972-9877, Fax: 212 972 9878. Contacts for Britain, Canada, Japan, Mexico, Holland, Costa Rica and more available via this office.

Third World Network, 228 Macalister Rd, Penang, Malaysia Tel: 60 4 373 511, Fax: 60 4 368 106

Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy, A-60 Haus Khas, New Delhi, India 110016 Tel: 91 11 665 003, Fax: 91 11 685 6795

Brazilian Institute for Socio-Economic Analysis (IBASE), Rua Vicente de Souza, 12 - Botafogo, 22251-070 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil Tel: 55 21 286 6161, Fax: 55 21 286 0541

### BRITAIN

Gaia Foundation, 18 Well Walk, Hampstead, London NW3 1LD. Tel: 0171 435 5000, Fax: 0171 431 0551

New Economics Foundation, 1st Floor, Vine Court, 112-116 Whitechapel Rd, London E1 1JE. Tel: 0171 377 5696, Fax: 0171 377 5720

### CANADA

Action Canada Network, 4 Jeffrey Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1L 0E2 Tel: 613 746 5256, Fax: 613 233 6776

Greenpeace, 185 Spadina Avenue, Toronto, ON M6G 4A2 Tel: 416 597 8408, Fax: 416 597 8422

### US

Redefining Progress, 1 Kearny St, 4th floor, San Francisco, CA 94108 Tel: 415 781 1191, Fax: 415 781 1198

Foundation for Deep Ecology, 950 Lombard St, San Francisco, CA 94113 Tel: 415 771 3394, Fax: 415 771 1121

Institute for Local Self-Reliance, 1313 5th St, Minneapolis, MN 55414 Tel: 612 379 3814, Fax: 612 379 3920

### AUSTRALIA

Permaculture International, PO Box 6039, South Lismore, NSW 2480 Tel: 066 22 0020, Fax: 066 22 0579

Social Alternatives Collective, c/o Dept of Government, University of Queensland, St Lucia, QLD 4072 Tel: 07 365 2324, Fax: 07 365 1388

### AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

Green Party, PO Box 11652, Wellington Tel: 04 475 7818, Fax: 04 475 3552

Sustainable Cities Trust, PO Box 4490, Christchurch Tel/Fax: 03 343 3242

### BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

There is a vast, expanding growing library of academic and popular writing on green economics. A definite growth area (pardon the pun). This is a partial list of the most approachable and useful introductory texts. *The Ecology of Commerce* by Paul Hawken (HarperCollins, New York, NY 1993) is justly revered as a classic. Written in an elegant yet conversational style with a mixture of penetrating analysis and common sense. *For the Common Good* by Herman Daly and John Cobb (Beacon Press, Boston, MA 1989) is an exhaustive, groundbreaking study and one of the most important books in the field. Part philosophy and part economics it is both visionary and practical. *Wealth Beyond Measure: An Atlas of New Economics*, (GAIA Books, London, Britain 1992) is a wide-ranging primer divided into readable bits and chock full of graphics. For green economics with a new-age twist try Barbara Brandt's *Wholelife Economics: Revaluing Daily Life* (New Society, Gabriola Island, BC, 1995). And the Worldwatch Institute's yearly *State of the World* report (Lester Brown et al, WW Norton, New York and London, yearly) on our progress towards a sustainable society is a reliable, colourful and sobering collection of data and analysis on major environmental trends.

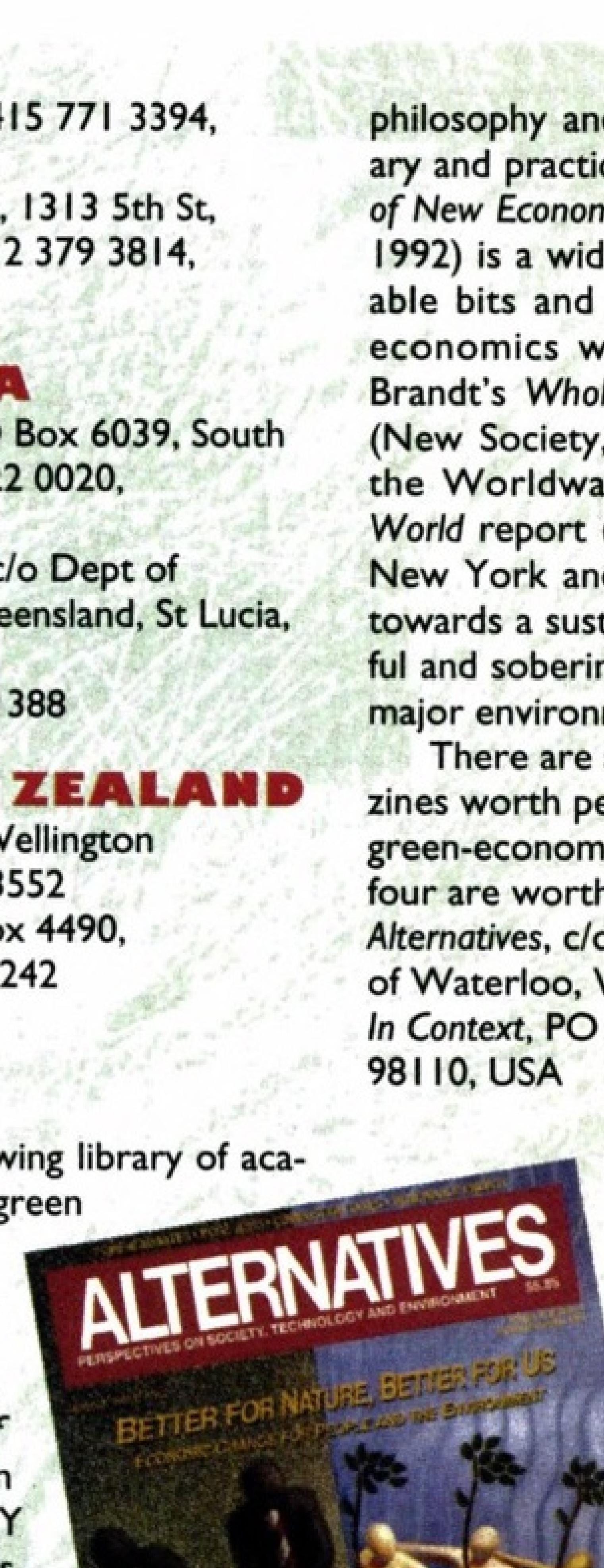
There are also a handful of excellent magazines worth perusing if you want to keep up on green-economics issues on a regular basis. These four are worth a look:

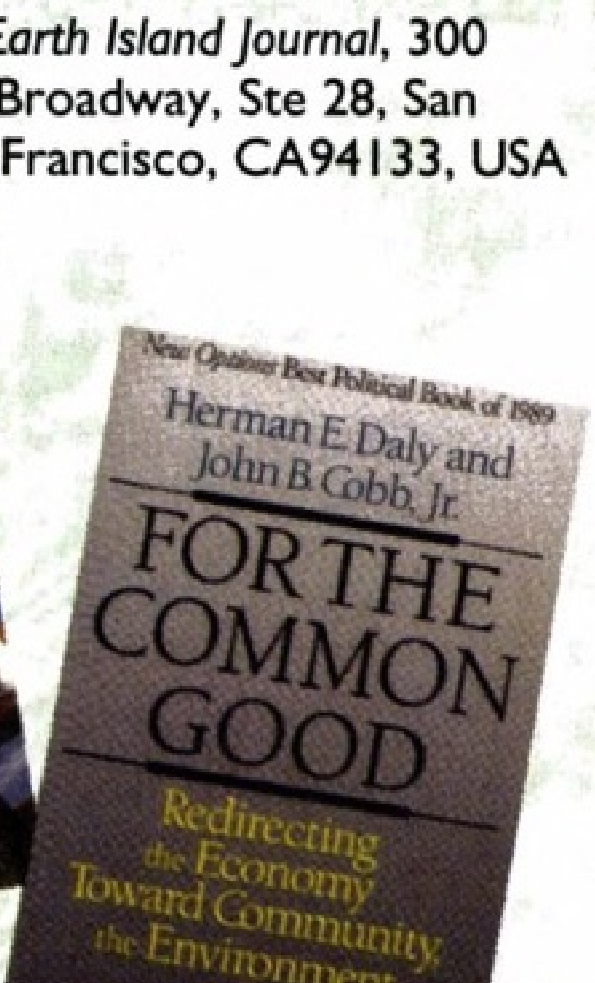
*Alternatives*, c/o Environmental Studies, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON Canada N2L 3G1

*In Context*, PO Box 11470, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110, USA

*Resurgence*, Ford House, Hartland, Bideford, Devon EX39 6EE, Britain

*Earth Island Journal*, 300 Broadway, Ste 28, San Francisco, CA94133, USA


ALTERNATIVES
PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIETY, TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT
BETTER FOR NATURE, BETTER FOR US


New Options Best Political Book of 1989
Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr.
FOR THE COMMON GOOD
Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future

# The NI Interview

# Olisa Agbakoba

Nigeria's vicious military despots face a formidable opponent in human-rights lawyer Olisa Agbakoba. **Murray MacAdam** caught up with him on the campaign trail.

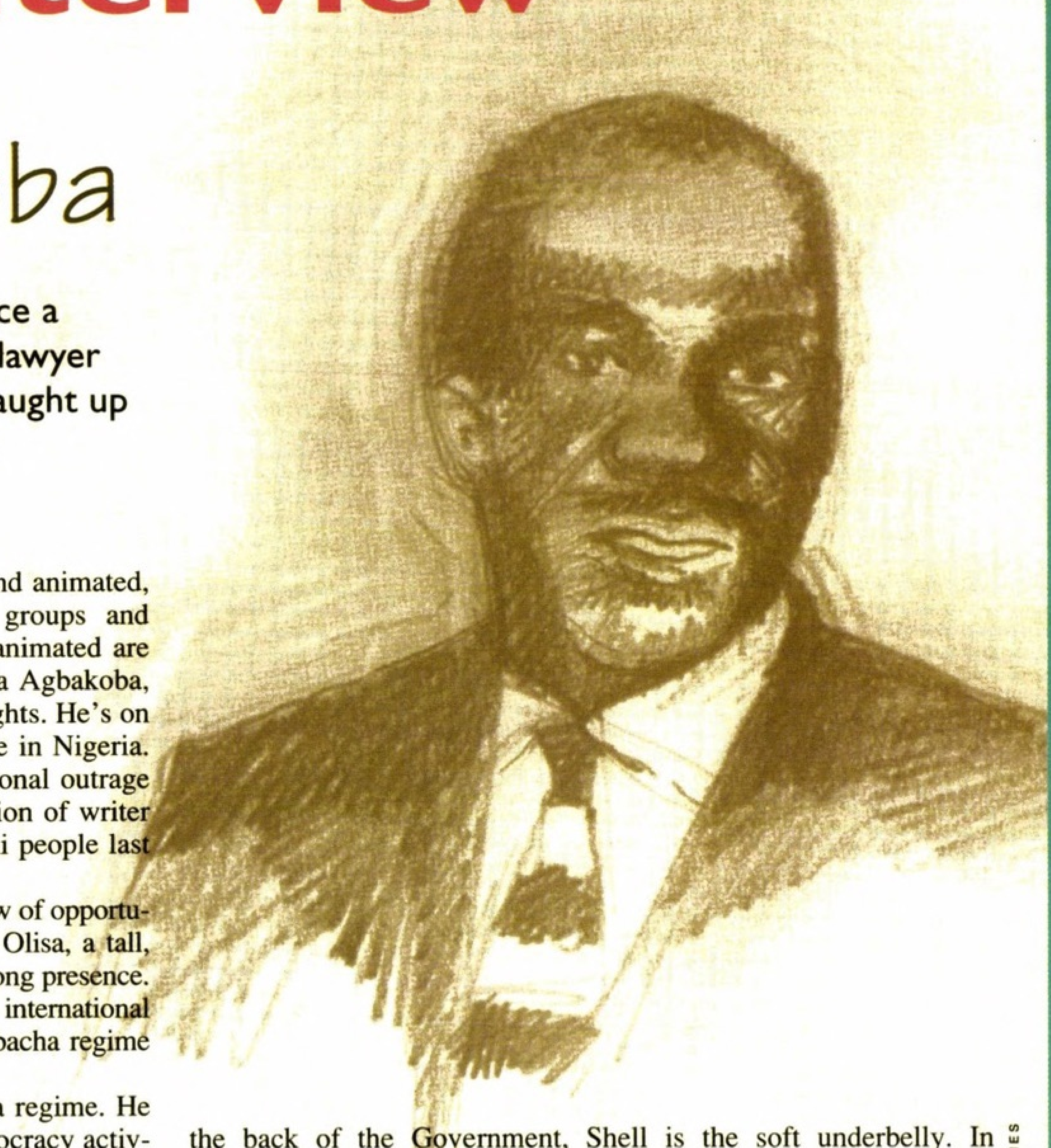


ILLUSTRATION: ALAN HUGHES

The eyes grab hold of you. They are still bright and animated, even as this day-long seminar with church groups and Nigerian expatriates is winding down. Equally animated are the quick gestures and razor-sharp mind of Olisa Agbakoba, one of Nigeria's foremost defenders of human rights. He's on the road to mark the 30th anniversary of military rule in Nigeria. It's not that hard to stoke public anger. The international outrage over Nigerian dictator General Sani Abacha's execution of writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists of the Ogoni people last November is still running high.

'Since Ken's (Saro-Wiwa's) sad death, a new window of opportunity is opening up for the resistance movement,' says Olisa, a tall, powerfully-built young man who projects an equally strong presence. 'We're trying to build on that strength, pushing for international mechanisms to keep the oppressive character of the Abacha regime on the front burner of the international community.'

Olisa knows first-hand the brutality of the Abacha regime. He has been jailed or detained repeatedly for his pro-democracy activities, including a six-month stint in 1993 following the military coup that pushed Chief Moshood Abiola from power and installed Abacha. Olisa's car was riddled with bullets on election day in 1993. Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka fled Nigeria in 1994 after learning that the authorities planned to put him under house arrest. But Olisa remains in Nigeria, despite the danger.

'There are certain things you're committed to doing,' he says. 'We've taken a stand against this rapacious military government. Sometimes I wish I were like a taxi driver in Lagos, who at the end of the day just wants a cold beer,' he smiles. His grin fades as he adds: 'I don't like to think that if something happens to me, my kids may grow up without a father. Yet it's in my interest to see that my kids don't have to live under this, that they enjoy good healthcare and live under a decent government.'

But laughter soon punctures that sombre mood, as Olisa admits: 'One doesn't do this for the money! I'm a volunteer.'

Combining a dogged determination with a zest for life has no doubt helped this engaging young lawyer to survive. Agbakoba has been one of the most persistent critics of the Abacha regime. He's past-president of the Civil Liberties Organization, a leading Nigerian human-rights advocacy group. Other distinguished posts include membership of the Board of Trustees of the International Centre for the Protection of Cultural Diversity and Human Rights in Africa, and the Justice and Peace Commission of Nigeria's Catholic Secretariat. He juggles all of that while supporting his family as a lawyer.

> ***'Sometimes I wish I were like a taxi driver in Lagos, who at the end of the day just wants a cold beer'***

The international outcry which greeted the murder of Saro-Wiwa gives Nigeria's embattled democracy activists cause for hope – if the global community acts.

'If the international community fails to play the game properly, momentum will be lost,' Olisa warns. Boycotting the Nigerian oil produced by Royal Dutch Shell is an obvious first step. 'To break the back of the Government, Shell is the soft underbelly. In Nigeria big business and government go together.'

But even more important, Olisa believes, is a 'total denial of the military establishment' – slapping visa restrictions on Nigeria's leaders. Some of the regime's rulers are billionaires, says Olisa, and their assets hold the key to change. 'A top priority is freezing the assets of the military leaders and their stolen money in overseas bank accounts. If Western nations would commit to freezing these assets the regime would fall.'

While the brutal denial of democracy by Nigeria's dictatorship is Olisa's chief concern, his interest in human rights doesn't stop there. He supervised a team of researchers who delved into the sorry state of Nigeria's prisons. Olisa's exposé, *Behind the Wall*, resulted in improved conditions in the jails, including better food rations. Prison death rates dropped dramatically.

Olisa also heads up AfroNet, a Zambia-based pan-African human-rights organization. It promotes greater concern for human rights across the continent by training community organizations in human-rights advocacy work and providing them with resources.

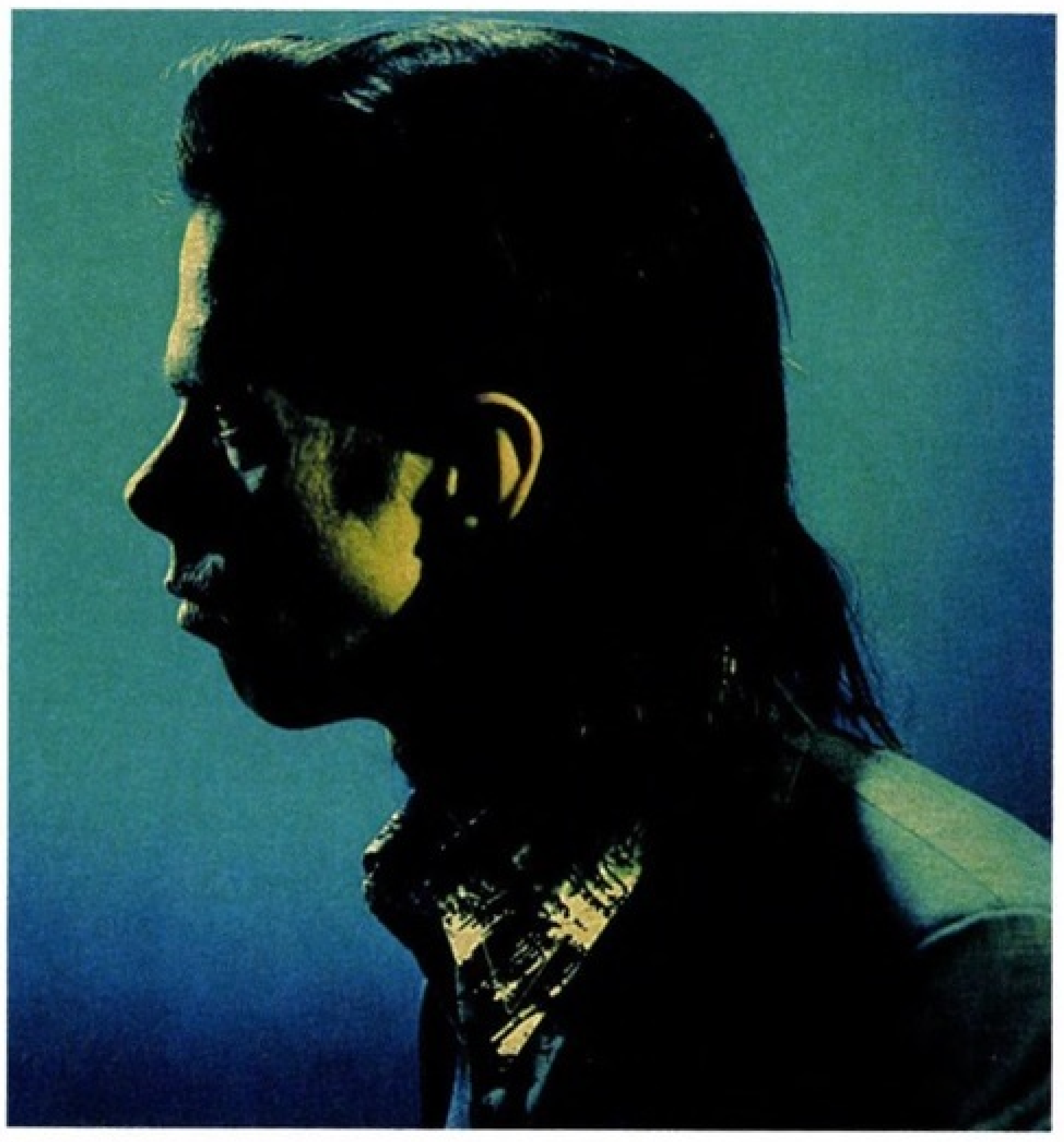
'Our problem is that conflict resolution and peace-making are not used as effective tools,' says Olisa, taking time to choose his words. 'AfroNet is defining an indigenous human-rights policy for Africa. We need to pursue human rights on the basis of African conditions.'

The dark circles around the eyes in Olisa's youthful face testify to the gruelling pace of his tour. Yet as Nigerian expatriates and others approach to thank him for his presentation, he springs to his feet with a kind word for each one. Solidarity clearly means a lot.

'One thing that brings joy is when people at the grassroots acknowledge what we do, stopping you in the street, encouraging you to carry on,' he says. 'A lady working in the Austrian Embassy in Lagos sent me the most wonderful Christmas card. She simply wrote: "Don't give up." That meant more to me than all the gifts I received.'

When he returned to Nigeria, Olisa Agbakoba was interrogated by police and had his passport seized. ■

# Reviews



**Nick Cave: an astute talent in a sea of moral panic.**

## music

### Murder Ballads

by **Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds**

*(Mute Stumm 138 CD)*

That Nick Cave has themed his latest – and tenth – solo album around murder should surprise no-one. The Australian songwriter has long spoken of his fascination for what he calls the 'language of violence'. Earlier songs like *The Mercy Seat*, an account of a condemned killer's last moments before execution or *John Finn's Wife*, a humid story of lust and death, were both musically and dramatically *tours de forces*. Cave's epic approach to songs marks him out as a fine storyteller with an astute talent for broad, vivid lines. His own language is unique in current rock music: peppered with Biblical imagery mixed with that of American folk song: his facility for words is matched only by older peers, Bob Dylan or Leonard Cohen.

There are some truly chilling songs, like *Song of Joy* which appropriates some of Satan's best lines from *Paradise Lost* in a way that consciously blurs the identity of the killer. There are some hilarious songs: the *Curse of Millhaven*, a romping inventory of the exploits of a teenage psycho named Laureate, is straight out of Tom Lehrer.

**Murder Ballads** arrives at a moment when rock music is being scrutinized by censors in the grip of a moral panic. Recent furore surrounding rap albums from black American artists has suggested a casual link: that singing about violence is tantamount to inciting it. This is, in my opinion, a spurious logic which conceals a more generalized fear about violence itself. Cave's enduring power is to confront the passion and its capacity to be simultaneously destructive and creative. Singing about death is another way of approaching life. And the fact that Cave is, at heart, an old-fashioned moralist is often ignored.

There are many reasons why **Murder Ballads** is a superlative album. Cave's voice is a constantly maturing vehicle, the deep tones startling and moving. Guitarists Blixa Bargeld and Mick Haney produce a multi-textured roughness while percussionist Jim Sclavunus and pianist Conway Savage provide the sparse, rhythmical undertow characteristic of Cave's music. There is nothing superfluous, nothing redundant. Cave may take his cues from raw blues and preacher songs but he does so in a way that enlarges the format. And in his unflinching recognition of the very ordinariness of violence there is nothing gratuitous. A rare, superb treat.

**Entertainment** ☆☆☆☆☆

**Politics** ☆☆☆☆

LG

## books

### The Thousand Faces of Night

by **Githa Hariharan**

*(Women's Press ISBN 0-7043-4465-3)*

This is a novel about the elemental things of life: about love and death, about women and men, story and myth, passion and loneliness and clashes of cultures and of continents. Three women, Devi, Sita and Mayamma, span three generations and encompass three goddesses in their names.

Each of them has their own story to tell: Devi, the daughter, educated in America, married to the pompous Mahesh; Sita, the mother, sacrificing herself to the gods of reason, order and progress, and Mayamma, the old servant, married when still a girl to a drunken husband and abused by husband, mother-in-law and son.

Githa Hariharan revels in colour, taste and smell. The book brims with the smells of coconut oil and sweat, with the colours of the flowers in the garden: 'laburnum, with topaz grapes clustering among the sunlit leaves, brilliant pink and white acacia, cream and lemon-yellow frangipani, hazy, plum-coloured jacarandas,' with the feel of the echoing empty house and with the weight of other people's censure: 'a woman without a child, say the sages, goes to hell.'

You must obey society's rules or terrible things will happen. And if you cannot do this, at least you must pretend; pretend to be a good wife; put on your sari of shimmering red and white silk and pretend to love entertaining your husband's colleagues and their wives, pretend that you are never sick:

WINNER OF THE COMMONWEALTH WRITERS PRIZE
The Thousand Faces of Night
GITHA HARIHARAN
'Githa Hariharan's fiction is wonderful - full of subtleties and humour and tenderness.'
Michael Ondaatje

'My grandmother fed me this story with her bony fingers, just as she fed me the gooey medicinal potions she brewed when I was ill. She sprinkled it with powdered jaggery and pretended it was sweet. I played the game by the rules and pretended to get better immediately.'

These rules, like the lives of the goddesses whose stories weave in and out of the story with silken threads, can be brutal. Devi's grandmother's stories throw strange reflections on lived reality; the princess Gandhari who found on her marriage that she ruled a palace where 'priceless gems, the size of ripe pumpkins, hung at the tips of chandeliers'. But when she finally meets her new husband, she sees he has 'white eyes, glazed and useless'. Gandhari, in fury at the deception, tears off a piece of her thick red skirt and ties it around her own eyes.

Like Gandhari the three women in the book have to find a way to come to terms with life. Devi chafes at the rules of her new marital situation – 'the housewife should always be joyous, adept at domestic work, neat in her domestic wares, and restrained in expenses'. But she feels trapped in her house and her role; she longs for passion, for abandonment, and tries to find it by running away into the arms of a lover, the slick and bearded musician Gopal.

'A woman meets her fate alone', Devi's grandmother tells her. **The Thousand Faces of Night** reveals just how true this is. But it also leaves us with hope for a different kind of future.

**Politics** ☆☆☆

**Entertainment** ☆☆☆☆

NG

## film

### Small Faces
directed by **Gilles Mackinnon**

### Trainspotting
directed by **Danny Boyle**

The young literary scene in Scotland has caused much excitement in recent years. Now it's cinema's turn. **Small Faces**, Gilles and Billy Mackinnon's wry, sometimes dark tale of growing up in Glasgow in the late 1960s, marks an important point. And the feverish, much-acclaimed **Trainspotting** – though directed by an Englishman – is also very much a Scottish project, based on Edinburgh writer Irvine Welsh's cult novel and produced and scripted by two Scots.

No doubt the films will be claimed as 'British' triumphs as they scoop up prizes and critical plaudits. But they clearly derive their energy and substance from contemporary Scottish culture and sense of place – and it's not the Scotland of the Hollywood historical epics *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy*, where the country becomes just a rugged, heather-covered backdrop for romanticized tales of struggle.

**Small Faces** focuses on young Lex McLean – an impish, somewhat precocious 13 year old who is torn between the examples set by his two elder teenage brothers. Alan, who plans to be a painter, has a somewhat detached, dreamy view of life, while Bobby is the robust pragmatist who has already become embroiled in the edgy gang culture. While the film is very much rooted in a particular grim reality – gang crime in Glasgow at that particular time was notorious – it has a gothic, fantastical flourish to it as with one eerie moment when the lads horseplay about with skeletons – Alan uses them for his drawing studies. It is beautifully composed and resonant sequences like this which send the film soaring. The Scottish new wave is here.

**Entertainment** ☆☆☆
**Politics** ☆☆☆ LF

**STAR** RATING

| | |
|---|---|
| **Excellent** | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| **Very good** | ☆☆☆☆ |
| **Good** | ☆☆☆ |
| **Fair** | ☆☆ |
| **Poor** | ☆ |

Reviews by **Louise Gray**, **Lizzie Francke** and **Nikki van der Gaag**
Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

# Masque of the Red Death

**...being the albums that shriek, growl, whisper and coo against complacency.**

KNEELING BY MY BED as a child I would rip through my prayers. What came out was a rapid-fire mumble, an evaporation for a hazy God. From such shaky beginnings came years of agnostic search. Post-modern ideas about the God-concept seemed to be frozen by notions of terminal cool. The bleakness of life has become an artistic cop-out and catch-all. God is now either passé or a fascist. Neither attitude implies dialogue. Most of us uneasy with the constraints of formal religion prefer not to let the idea of God bother us unduly.

It is in this context that Diamanda Galás's **Masque of the Red Death** makes an unsettling challenge, though its concerns, at first sight, are very different.

Diamanda Galás is a Greek-American diva with a three-and-a-half octave vocal range. This fact in itself is not so remarkable, but within her larynx dwell notes that aren't on any octave: they're the missing keys of the keyboard, fierce, visceral, tormented sounds – growls, whispers, shrieks, death rattles, unctuous cooing, soprano glissandi, shamanic slithers. Members of the audience have been known to faint and have panic attacks during live performances. Her piano style, honed whilst playing with jazz legend Ornette Coleman in the 1970s, is lean and aggressive, carving out an aural space for this voice.

Galás's entire body of work is a blast against complacency. Its provocations are often misinterpreted – her records have been exorcised by right-wing Christian groups and the Italian press denounced her for blasphemy. But it is exactly the kind of hardline religiosity that brooks no challenges, that condemns people to be either devout or pariahs, that she so effectively attacks.

**Masque of the Red Death** is a trilogy in response to the bigotry that some sections of the church displayed in the face of the AIDS crisis. But it also deals with the age-old questions of the meaning of human suffering.

The first part – **The Divine Punishment** (1986) – is derived almost entirely from Old Testament texts and exposes the kind of medieval loathing of the body that some sections of the church regressed to when faced with AIDS, transforming their God into a blind and merciless tyrant that would punish 'perverts'. Interspersed are texts from the Psalms where the innocent cry out, forsaken by God and surrounded by enemies. Galás creates a bleak and merciless wasteland from these sacred texts, exposing the lack of Christian charity of the religious Right. On the closing track of the album the outcast affirms all the condemnation ('I am the Holy Fool/ I am the shit of God'), reclaiming the abuse in a radical stance of complete defiance.

**Saint of the Pit** (1988) uses the hothouse lyricism of Baudelaire, Nerval and Corbière with all their anti-heroic despair to create an album of heart-wrenching beauty. The opening vocal is a lament called *Deliver Me* which draws on Greek traditions of angry mourning, her voice soaring into the stratosphere, blazing against fatalism despite the inevitability of having to accept fate. This attitude values the human spirit against the virus – whether the virus be HIV or social malaise – and is the crux of the album, a large part of which is dedicated to her brother Philip-Dimitri, who had recently died of AIDS-related illness.

The final album, **You Must Be Certain of the Devil** (1988), transgresses upon more popular territory: gospel and rock. On the title track Galás squeals like Aretha Franklin on speed, subverting gospel comfort to the idea that evil is all around us and that goodness in the light of this fact is not just a state of mind but an active fight. The album closes with a chilling recital of *The Lord is My Shepherd* in a deathbed voice that gasps and wheezes for every breath, the reassuring words barely discernible. This juxtaposition of the corporeal reality of death with the metaphysical promise of eternal life is excruciating; it opens every fear of the void that religion is used as a prop against.

Saint of The Pit

Needless to say Galás is not a darling of rock journalism. She has been branded a 'terrorist', 'a screeching hag' and her records voted as 'most likely to rid your house of unwelcome guests'. In a hugely sexist industry, she has zero bimbo appeal. A recent album exposed the misogyny of macho music with mordant humour – the cover showed Diamanda lounging on a flash car's bonnet, knife in hand, ready, it would appear, to harvest testicles. No-one else sounds remotely like her and the territory she covers is fraught with danger. Her work ruthlessly exposes insecurity, it is provocative and challenging, and whereas for many it is just too threatening, for others its honesty is essential and a source of realizing one's own power. What's the point of suffering? it asks. The answer seems to be both that there is no point and that facing up to it with humane courage is the point. ■

**Dinyar Godrej**

**Masque of the Red Death** by **Diamanda Galás** is available through Mute Records.

# Curiosities

**QUESTIONS THAT HAVE ALWAYS INTRIGUED YOU ABOUT THE WORLD WILL APPEAR IN THIS, YOUR SECTION, AND BE ANSWERED BY OTHER READERS. PLEASE ADDRESS YOUR ANSWERS AND QUESTIONS TO 'CURIOSITIES'.**

**Why in most communities in the world do women live longer than men?**

● According to Roy Collins of Oxford University (*New Scientist,* 23 October 1993) sex chromosomes, pregnancy, gluttony and male genitalia may all have their part to play.

He writes: 'Mammalian females possess two X chromosomes, males only one... when something goes wrong with a woman's X chromosome she has a spare one in reserve. A man has nothing. Disorders like haemophilia that are caused by faults on the X chromosome are therefore more common in males. Such diseases are rare and cannot alone explain the gender gap, but it may be that X chromosome faults contribute to disease more subtly.'

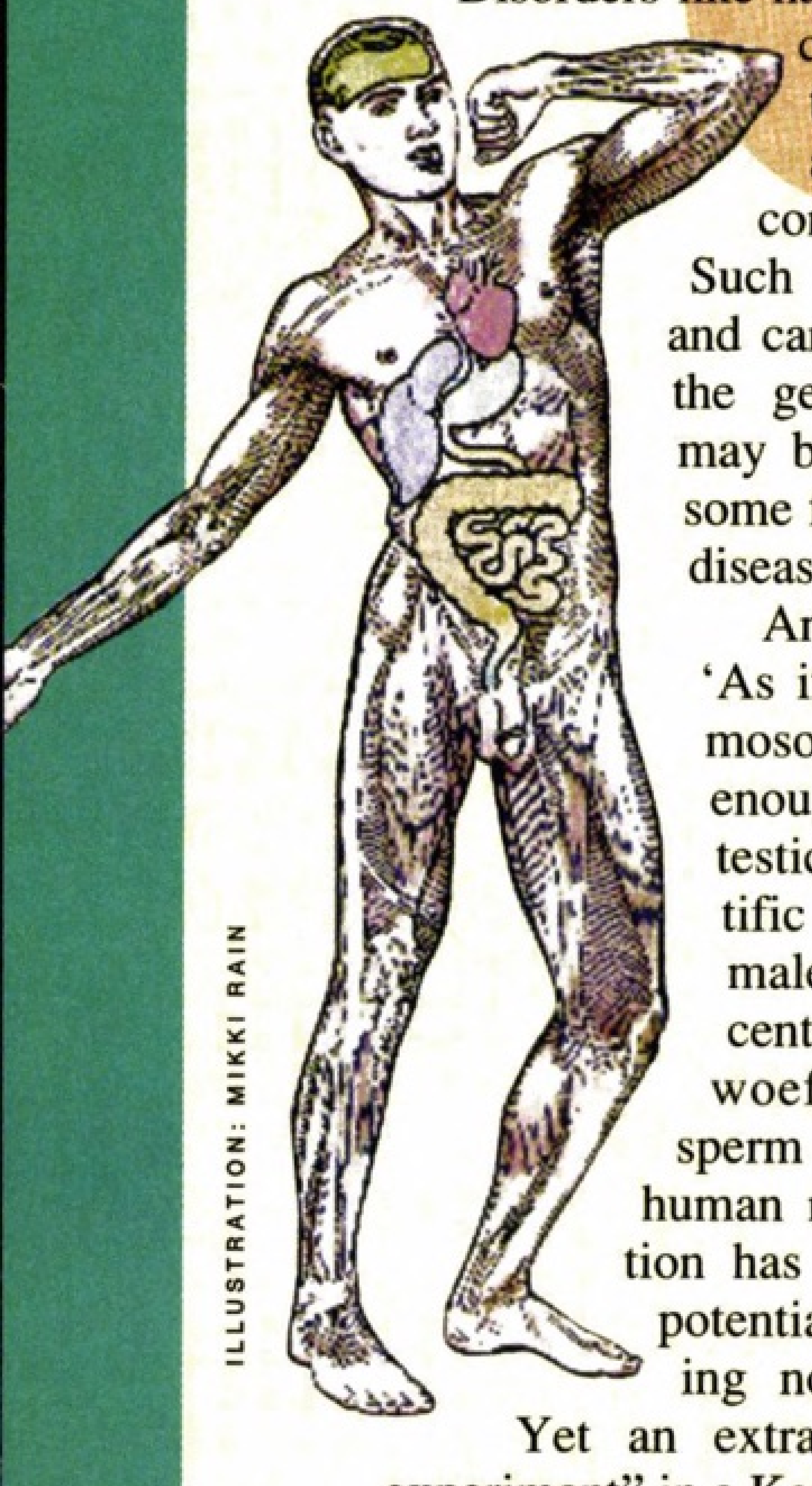


ILLUSTRATION: MIKKI RAIN

And, he continues, 'As if dodgy sex chromosomes are not enough, there are the testicles. Recent scientific concern with the male genitalia has centred around the woefully declining sperm count of the human male. Little attention has been paid to the potential benefit of having no testicles at all. Yet an extraordinary "natural experiment" in a Kansas mental hospital early this century found that patients who were castrated (in the dubious hope of controlling their violent behaviour) lived far longer – on average to 69 years of age whereas intact males managed a mere 56. Perhaps thankfully, these results have never been replicated but it is well known that castration increases the lifespan of other male mammals.'

Collins goes on to point out that: 'Gluttony, in the shape of heart disease, kills more men than women.' This may be because women are better at storing nutrients such as cholesterol in the body and it means they are better than men at coping with the excesses of a modern Western diet.

Then there are reckless male lifestyles. 'Men overeat more than women, and visit the doctor less. Throw in the odd war, murder, suicide and motor accident (in all of which men figure more prominently) and one can begin to see what is going on,' says Collins.

He concludes that the main reason that women are living longer than they used to is because they are having fewer children. 'Compared with the death rates of 60 or 70 years ago, today's figures show a sharp decline in female deaths during the childbearing years. Nowadays female death rates are lower than males in every single age group.'

**C Frank Fischl**
Glasgow, Scotland.

**Is there an organization that collects medical goods (not drugs) past their expiry date?**

● Out-of-date medical equipment (not drugs) can be used for Afghanistan and other countries by **Jacob's Well Appeal** (Registered Charity No. 515235), Dr B Benyon, 2 Ladygate, Beverley, Hull, HU 17 8BH, England. Tel: 01482 881162, Fax: 01482 865452. Or for Bosnian refugees by Dr J Fennell, **NW Refugee Aid**, 16 Birch Grove, Ashton in Wakefield, WN4 OQZ, England. Tel: 01942 274546.

**Kate Fussell**
Wigan, England

● **Intercare** sends medical supplies to small rural hospitals and clinics in seven African countries. It does so by collecting unused in-date drugs packaged as samples, together with discarded medical equipment, which it carefully sorts and dispatches. The address is: 49 Melton Road, Leicester, LE4 6PN, England. Tel: 0116 266 7326. Collection of items can be arranged.

**R Cudmore**
St Helens, England

## AWAITING YOUR ANSWERS

**When I donate blood am I doing myself any good – apart from the good feeling I get from the belief that I am helping other people? Is there any modern research on this?**

**Trefor Puw**
Newport, Wales

**Apart from lemmings and humans are there any other creatures that commit suicide?**

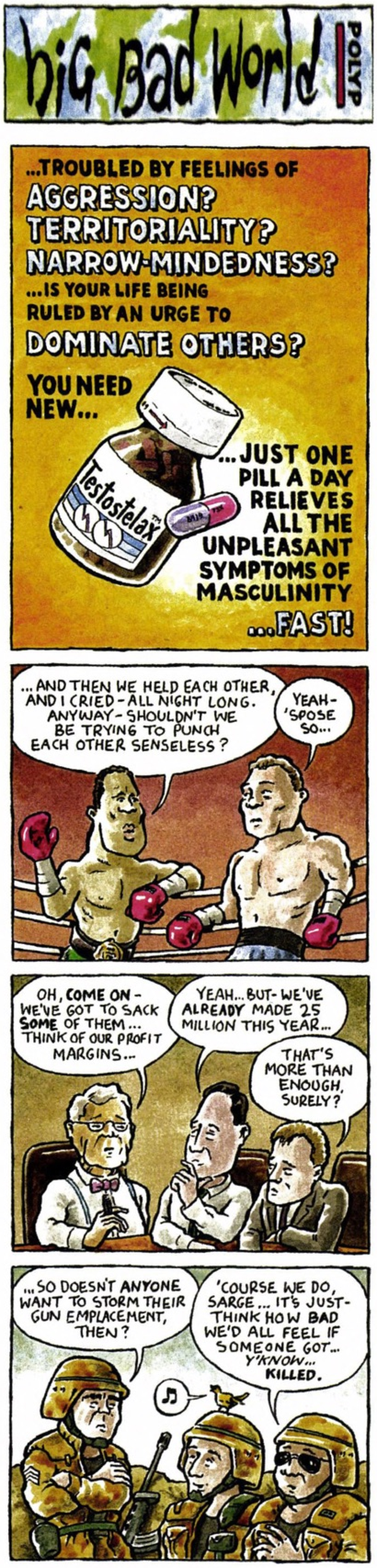
**D Gold**
Southrop, England

**How much energy is needed to manufacture an average-sized car?**

**Leigh Cavanagh**
Staines, England

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR ANSWERS PLEASE SEND THEM TO **CURIOSITIES, NEW INTERNATIONALIST, 55 RECTORY ROAD, OXFORD OX4 1BW, UK,** OR TO YOUR LOCAL NI OFFICE (SEE INSIDE FRONT COVER FOR ADDRESSES).

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS SECTION ARE NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF THE **NI**.


big Bad World
POLYP
...TROUBLED BY FEELINGS OF
AGGRESSION?
TERRITORIALITY?
NARROW-MINDEDNESS?
...IS YOUR LIFE BEING RULED BY AN URGE TO
DOMINATE OTHERS?
YOU NEED NEW...
Testostelax
...JUST ONE PILL A DAY RELIEVES ALL THE UNPLEASANT SYMPTOMS OF MASCULINITY
...FAST!
...AND THEN WE HELD EACH OTHER, AND I CRIED - ALL NIGHT LONG. ANYWAY - SHOULDN'T WE BE TRYING TO PUNCH EACH OTHER SENSELESS?
YEAH - 'SPOSE SO...
OH, COME ON - WE'VE GOT TO SACK SOME OF THEM... THINK OF OUR PROFIT MARGINS...
YEAH... BUT - WE'VE ALREADY MADE 25 MILLION THIS YEAR...
THAT'S MORE THAN ENOUGH, SURELY?
...SO DOESN'T ANYONE WANT TO STORM THEIR GUN EMPLACEMENT, THEN?
'COURSE WE DO, SARGE... IT'S JUST - THINK HOW BAD WE'D ALL FEEL IF SOMEONE GOT... Y'KNOW... KILLED.

# The Devil Bush

There may be a rational explanation for what happened to a village in the forests of West Africa, but **Donald MacIntosh** isn't keen to return.

OSEI the Carpenter had one hour to live, give or take a few minutes.

Not that he was aware of it. In fact he was rather pleased with himself. He had just embraced, with almost equal enthusiasm, the Muslim faith and Bindu his new wife. He had also been given permission by the village chief to build a hut for her – a privilege for anyone, and he was not of their people or even of their country.

Osei had arrived in the village many years earlier, footsore and weary, and asked permission to stay the night. He had never left. He became a man of substance through one talent – he was a carpenter of the highest quality. The golden-brown patina of African walnuts; the aphrodisiac fragrance of rose-pink guareas wood – only those born to be carpenters can appreciate the sort of pleasure experienced by Osei as he whittled and smoothed the time away in his lean-to shop under the old mango tree at the foot of the village. People came from far and wide to purchase his carvings.

With that, Osei the Carpenter was content. He had no further ambitions left – except to build a splendid house for Bindu. So he toiled away in the yellow heat of noon, heaving at the heavy mahogany planks he had pitsawn and stacked at the edge of his farm during the previous dry season.

Eventually just the bottom tier of planks remained. It was now cocooned in a tangled mat of thorny vines, which he attacked with his machete. He tugged at the nearest length of timber – and the whole tier came apart with a splintery explosion. He stumbled backwards onto his rump.

A long, black coil slid from the timber and grabbed his leg, chewing like a dog – as cobras will – each bite injecting enough venom to flatten an elephant.

Osei was laid to rest in the Devil Bush, a tract of low-lying, swampy forest a few miles from the village. Snakes infested it, hairy spiders lay in wait behind vast, sticky webs. It was a silent, gloomy place, forbidden to all except the witch doctor and his burial parties, and frequented – as legend would have it – by the souls of the dead.

Two years passed before I returned, and I was well on my way to the village before I realized that the path would take me close to the Devil Bush. Then a movement far in front of me caught my attention and I stopped. The figure of a woman was moving slowly down the path towards me. She was balancing a large pan on her head, piled high with yams and plantains.

'Bindu!' I exclaimed. She looked at me through milky-white eyes. She was completely blind.

'You are the white man who used to buy things from Osei the Carpenter,' she said. I knew the ways of the forest better than to ask how, with her blindness, she had known instantly who I was. 'I am taking food to my husband,' she continued. 'He is building a house for me in the Devil Bush.'

She turned off the path and headed down the hill to the Devil Bush. At the edge of the swamp she turned to face me. She was smiling with the purest serenity and joy. She was, I realized with sudden shock, quite mad.

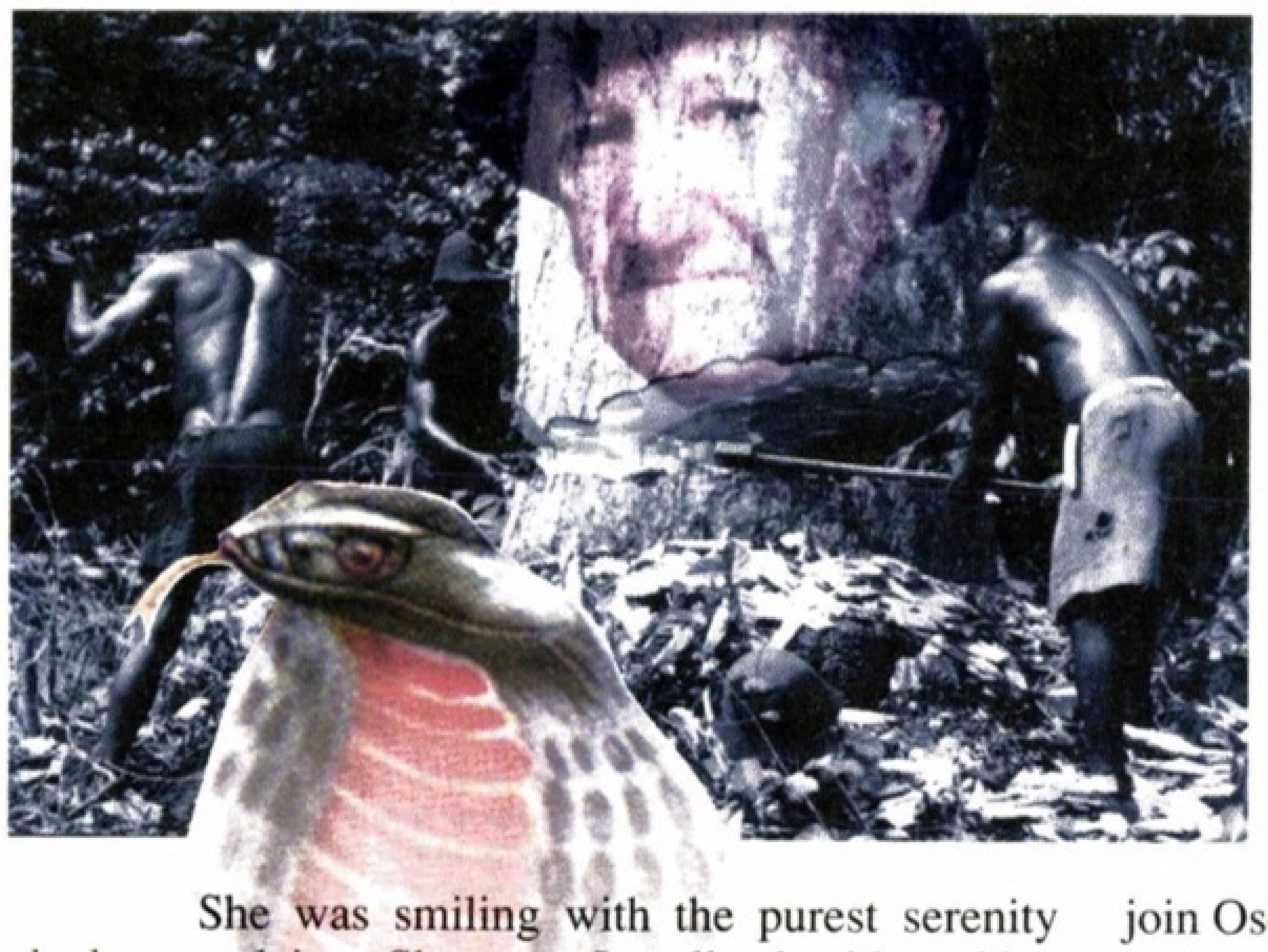


PHOTO: DONALD MACINTOSH

'Take care how you walk, white man,' she said. 'You may meet Osei the Carpenter on the path in front of you.'

My feet fairly flew over the ground until I reached the point where the path meandered through the timbered valley to the clean, fresh air of the hills around the village. I rounded a corner and there in front of me was an enormous spitting cobra making for the Devil Bush. It reared up, its vivid red hood flaring, black bootlace tongue flicking. Deciding I was harmless it lowered its head and slid away.

I stood rooted to the spot and slowly became aware of a tapping sound, a tac-tac-tac from deep within the swamp. Then I found myself walking down the slope to the edge of the Devil Bush.

The tapping stopped. Far out a light flickered, dim and bluish like a smoky lantern, moving in the heart of the swamp. Then I saw another, and another, coming towards me, faster and faster, over the black water. I yelled. A great grey heron rose from a clump of reeds close by, wings beating, up towards the evening stars. The spell was broken. I turned and fled to the village.

'What has happened to the village and your people?' I asked later as I sat with the village chief outside his hut.

The chief said that he had taken Osei's three wives into his ménage, as decreed by tribal law. Bindu was still distraught and had foolish Muslim ideas about fidelity – she had to be forced into sharing his bed. Two days later she had come upon a large cobra which spat its venom full in her face, blinding her. A week later a terrible sickness visited the entire village. One after another the villagers were carried off to the Devil Bush. Now only the chief, his senior wife and the youngest wife of Osei the Carpenter were left.

The chief sat in silence for a long time. At last he whispered: 'The snake you saw was Osei the Carpenter!' I said nothing, remembering the snake-cult tradition among the people of the coast. 'Just before my people took sick and died, the snake entered every house in the village except my own. One night soon it will come to my house, and then I will join Osei the Carpenter in the Devil Bush.'

'Lassa fever,' said my eminent medical friend brusquely, many years later, when I told him the story. 'Nothing ghostly about it. A serious viral disease spread by rats. Only properly identified in 1969...'

We were sitting in the plush surroundings of a London hotel. He himself had practised for many years in West Africa and had made a detailed study of witch doctors.

I was still not satisfied. 'What about the lights?'

'*Ignis fatuus*!' he grinned smugly. '"Will-o'-the-Wisp" to you!... The rotting material produces methane, and this can be ignited by the traces of hydrogen phosphide...'

He rose and went over to the bar to order another round. I settled back in my chair and stared at the chandeliers. He was right, of course. But I wouldn't go back to the Devil Bush if you paid me a king's ransom. ■

**Donald MacIntosh** lived and worked as a forester in the rainforests of West and Central Africa for 30 years.

# Country profile

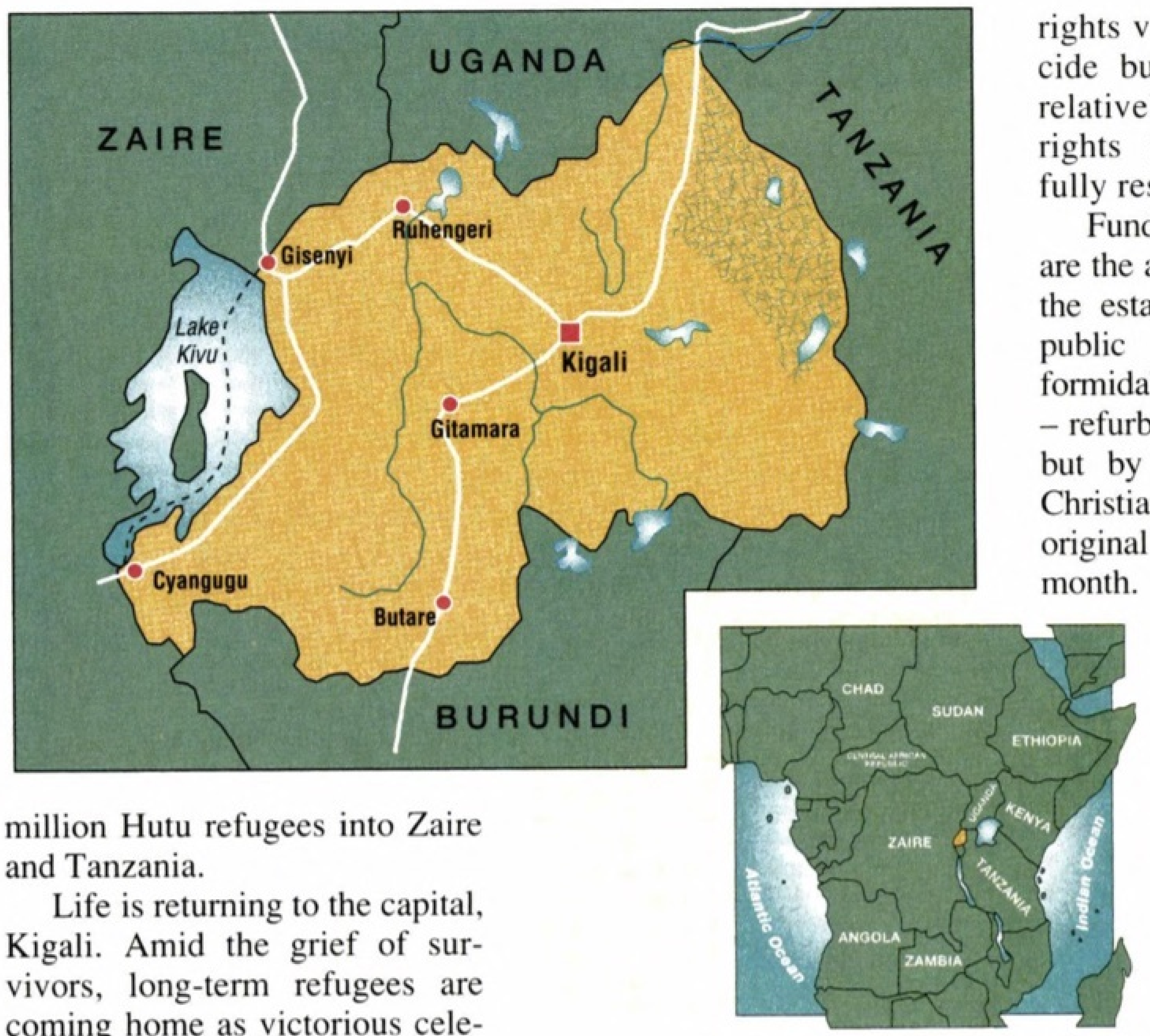
# Rwanda

SCATTERED across Emelienne's garden lie her husband's law books, neatly annotated in the margins. On the floor of an empty room is a child's shoe. The roof is smashed in, doors and windows are ripped out – hallmarks of the *Interahamwe* militia who in April 1994 launched the genocide of Rwanda's Tutsis.

Three of Emelienne's children and her husband were macheted to death by assailants who included neighbours and family friends. An estimated million people, including many Hutus opposed to the genocide, met similar deaths.

Rwanda has a history of bloodletting, rooted in the colonial promotion of the Tutsi minority as a ruling élite. In 1959, out of political expediency, the Belgians denounced their protégés as feudal overlords. Hutus seized power, massacring some 20,000 people. The Belgians abandoned the chaos and independence came in 1962.

Incursions by Tutsis who had fled to Uganda provoked further massacres and outflows of Tutsis. It was they, who with some moderate Hutus, finally returned in 1994 as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) to depose the genocidal regime, driving the national army along with two million Hutu refugees into Zaire and Tanzania.



Life is returning to the capital, Kigali. Amid the grief of survivors, long-term refugees are coming home as victorious celebrants, moving into the jobs and homes left empty by the dead and the fled. But can Rwanda escape its curse of violence?

'Our political training,' said a former RPF soldier, now a gendarme, 'was that our target was national unity, not revenge. I cannot kill my parents' murderers. I arrest people who do just that.'

The Army is reputedly well disciplined. Some 700 soldiers have been jailed for taking the law into their own hands. But Hutus will take much convincing that the Government wants reconciliation or that hardliners may not grab the steering wheel of power.

The Kibeho Massacre, when 2,000 Hutus were killed as the Army cleared a refugee camp, will not have eased their fears. Yet what is surprising is not that there have been serious human-rights violations since the genocide but that there have been relatively few – though human-rights monitoring is not yet fully restored.

Fundamental to reconciliation are the acknowledgement of guilt, the establishment of justice and public re-education. All are formidable tasks. In Kigali Court – refurbished not by governments but by the British aid agency, Christian Aid – 5 judges (of an original 24) try 100 cases a month. Some 11,000 genocide suspects await trial in Kigali Jail alone, and this before any mass return of refugees. 'If we charge everyone forced to staff a road block,' said a rights activist, 'we will have to try a million people.'

What is impressive, when there is everything to do, is that much is being done. Schools, businesses and agricultural production are being restored. Magistrates are being trained, laws changed and plans are afoot to release prisoners who could not be successfully prosecuted.

Is there optimism? 'That is no question to ask here yet,' I was told. All hangs on how many Rwandans of good will remain. ■

**Anthony Swift**

## AT A GLANCE

ANTHONY SWIFT

**Leader** President Pasteur Bizimungu (a Hutu heading a Tutsi-dominated regime)

**Economy** GNP per capita US$210, prior to the war and genocide (South Africa $2,980)

*Monetary unit:* Rwandese Franc

*Main exports:* Coffee (82% of export revenue), tea (12%), tungsten and tin ore (5%)

*Main imports:* food (15%), machinery and tools (14%), transport equipment (12%)

*External debt:* $992m (1992)

The main food crops are plantain, sweet potatoes, beans, cassava, maize and sorghum. The 1994 fighting caused the loss of 60% of the cereal and pulse crop.

**People** 7.8 million prior to the genocide. More than a million people are thought to have died in the genocide and the war. There are about two million Rwandan refugees outside the country.

**Health** Infant mortality in 1994 was 80 per 1,000 live births (UK 6 per 1,000), but the health service is having to be rebuilt from scratch.

**Culture** Hutus (90% of the population), Tutsis and Twa pygmies (less than 1%). Cultural differences between the two main groups are said to be greatly exaggerated and the Government discourages any reference to ethnic identity.

*Religion:* Catholic, Anglican and others

*Languages:* Kinyarwanda, French, English

## NI star rating

| | |
|---|---|
| EXCELLENT | ★★★★★ |
| GOOD | ★★★★ |
| FAIR | ★★★ |
| POOR | ★★ |
| APPALLING | ★ |

**Sources:** *New Africa Year Book 1995-6; State of the World's Children 1996,* UNICEF; *The World of Information Africa Review 1996; Rwanda and Genocide in the 20th Century,* Alain Destexhe, Pluto Press; Amnesty International; Christian Aid.

**Previously profiled May 1985**

## STAR RATINGS

**INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★★**
90 per cent of the population live on small family farms, under subsistence crops. Members of the élite were targeted in the genocide.
1985 ★★★

**SELF-RELIANCE ★**
A major aid recipient before the war, Rwanda will need billions of dollars in aid if it is to recover.
1985 ★★

**POSITION OF WOMEN ★★**
The role of women is changing as a result of the massacres – they are no longer so confined to the domestic duties.
1985 ★★

**LITERACY ★**
Adult literacy prior to 1994 was 54% but the educated classes were prime targets. Primary-school enrolment was 77%.
1985 ★★

**FREEDOM ★**
The media are state controlled. From colonial times Rwandans have had to survive in a climate of impunity. Multi-party elections are due in June 1999.
1985 ★★

**LIFE EXPECTANCY ★**
47 years (Canada 77 years). Survivors of the genocide speak of having been condemned to life.
1985 ★

## POLITICS

**NI ASSESSMENT ★★**
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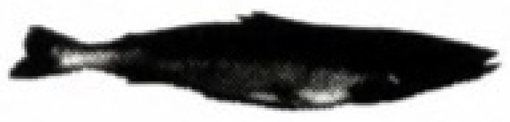

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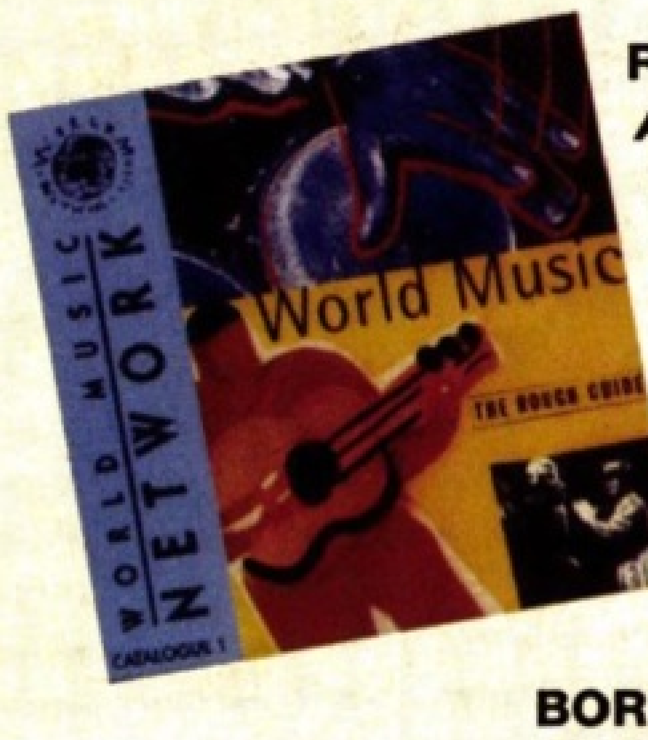

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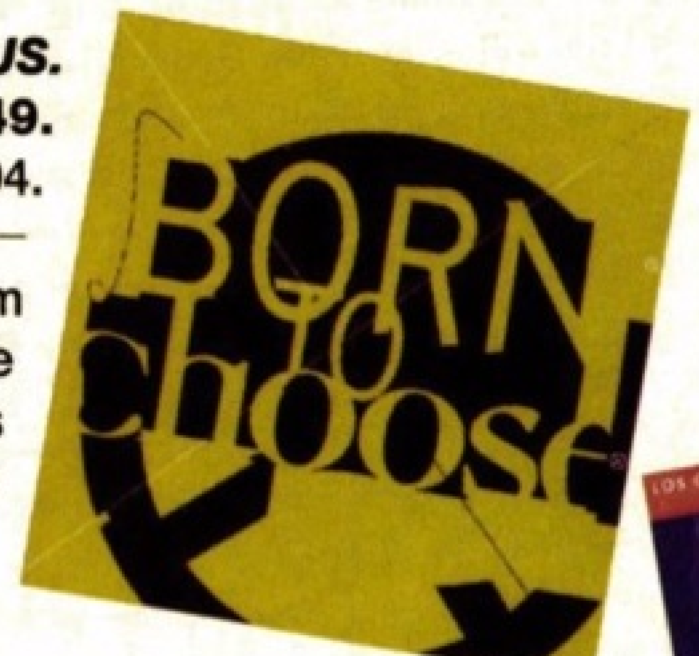

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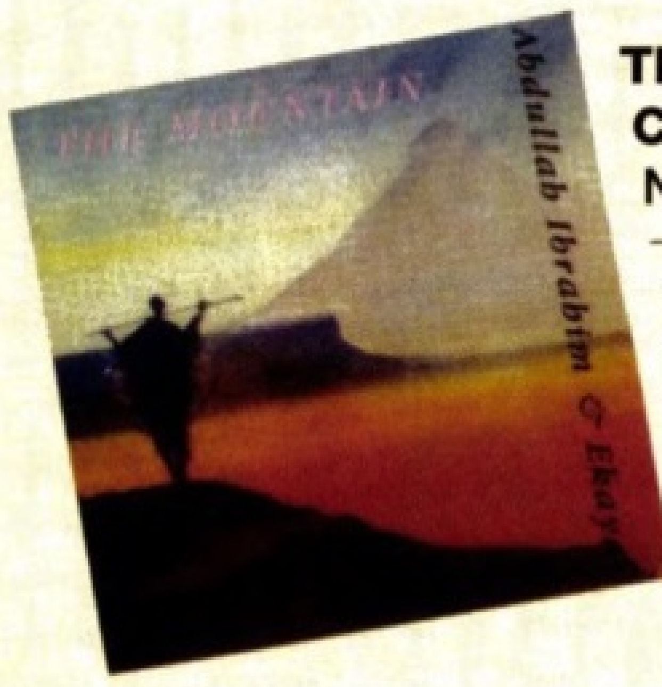

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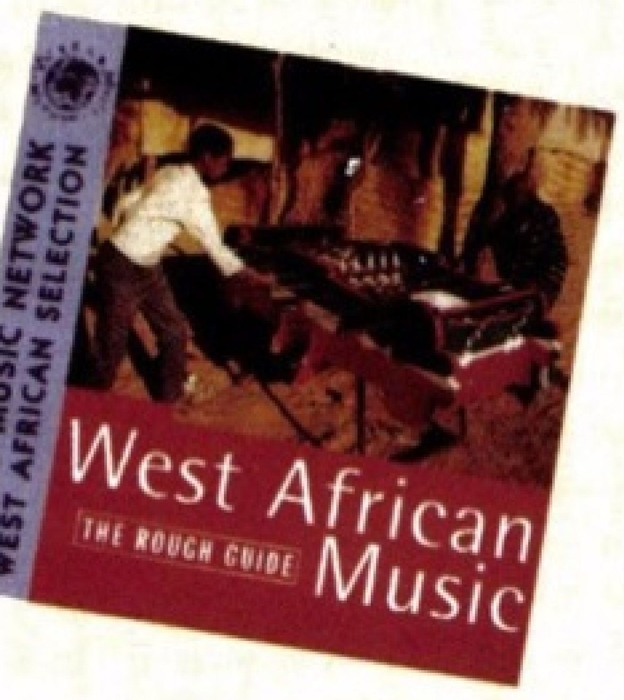

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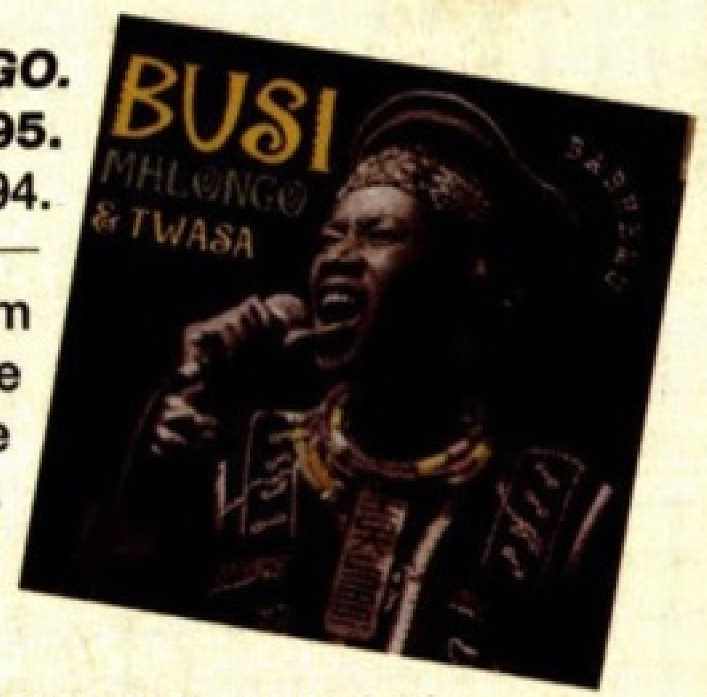

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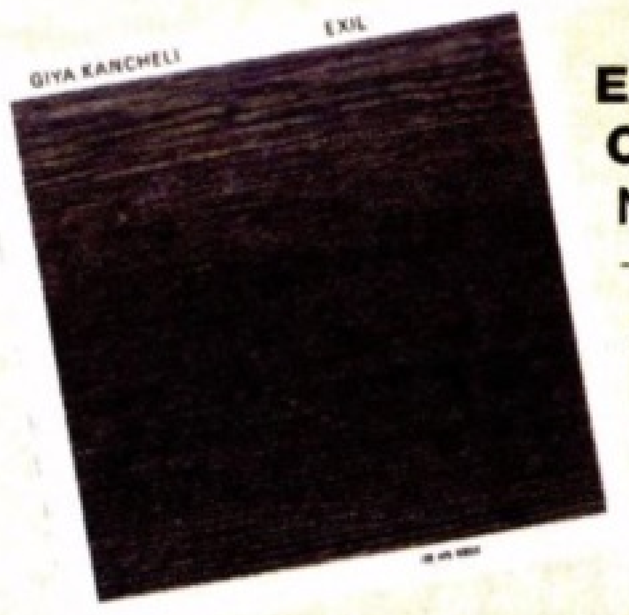

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